SOUL SALVATION, SOCIAL LIBERATION: RACE AND EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY IN THE BLACK POWER ERA, 1968-1979

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ABSTRACT

Soul Salvation, Social Liberation: Race and Evangelical Christianity in the Black Power Era, 1968-1979

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Soul Salvation, Social Liberation provides a critical intervention in the current historiography on evangelical Christianity by recovering the voices of Christians who defined themselves as "pro-black" and "pro-evangelical" during the black power era. The current scholarship overemphasizes the contributions of white evangelicals who organized themselves into a major support base for the Republican Party in the seventies. Further, the current scholarship misrepresents black evangelical Christians. Using D.W. Bebbington's definition of "evangelical religion," I identify seven black men who actually defined their Christian faith as "evangelical." Further, I examine the unique offerings that these men gave to evangelical Christian ministries between 1968 and 1979. I argue that they were the principal actors who challenged the movement to become anti-racist.

As a whole, black evangelicals created evangelical associations, wrote theological books, co-pastored interracial churches, and started businesses with two intentions. One, they intended to communicate the relevancy of evangelical Christianity to the social and political concerns of black people throughout the U.S. Two, they sought to build relationships with white Christians that were models of authentic racial reconciliation. Specifically, black evangelicals believed that their Christian faith afforded them to stand on equal footing with whites as fellow Christians and as U.S. citizens. Therefore, they spoke out against white supremacy and white privilege in

evangelical ministries and in U.S. society. However, their approaches to speaking out have defined how their stories have been documented in the scholarship.

Militant black evangelicals or those who vehemently denounced racism and privilege in evangelical associations were expelled from participation. As a result, they have been ignored in historical studies of those organizations. However, accommodationist black evangelicals who took a moderate approach to the problem of racism remained in prominent positions in evangelical organizations, and their contributions to the evangelical movement have been well-documented. By recovering the experiences of militant black evangelicals, this study offers insight into why racism has continued to plague the evangelical Christian movement since 1979.

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INTRODUCTION

Evangelicals from #BLM Back to Black Power

"If you don't know your history, you're going to end up repeating it. Open the story. Read it. And, then repeat it to one another. Do you see it? Do you see that racism is the age-old idol in our closet that we can't manage to tear down? The evangelical church has taken the dominance and power of Eurocentrism and made it its sidepiece, or part-time lover depending on how old you are. The Evangelical Church is perpetuating "white is right," and that is a burden that none of us can bear. Especially my white brothers and sisters. Let me talk to y'all and tell ya, God wants to relieve you of the burden of being in control… #BlackLivesMatter is not a mission of hate. It's not a mission to bring about incredible anti-Christian values and reforms to the world. #BlackLivesMatter is a movement on a mission in the truth of God."[1]

-Michelle Higgins, Urbana Conference, December 2015

"Any understanding of world evangelicalism and racism in our country must begin with an understanding of the history of racism. To understand why we are in the middle of a revolution in our time, to come to grips with what the black revolution is all about and to understand what the nature of racism in our society is, I must take you back approximately 350 years…Understand that for those of us who live in the black community, it was not the evangelical who came and taught us our worth and dignity as black men. It was not the Bible-believing fundamentalist who stood up and told us that black was beautiful. It was not the evangelical who preached to us that we should stand on our two feet and be men, be proud that black was beautiful and that God could work his life out through our redeemed blackness. Rather, it took Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, Rap Brown and the Brothers to declare to us our dignity. God will not be without a witness."[2]

-Tom Skinner, Urbana Conference, December 1970

The Role of Black Folk at Urbana, Thus Far

On Wednesday, December 30, 2015, the journalist and scholar, Tobin Grant, authored two articles on *Religion News Service* that were trending across several social media sites. The headlines read, "InterVarsity backs #BlackLivesMatters at Urbana 15" and "InterVarsity

[1] Michelle Higgins, "Untitled Address" (address, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship Urbana Conference, St. Louis, Missouri, December 28, 2015).
[2] Tom Skinner, "The U.S. Racial Crisis and World Evangelism" (address, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship Urbana Conference, Urbana-Champaign, Illinois, December 1970).

unabashed support for #BlackLivesMatter may be its boldest move yet."[3] Reading those two lines was captivating and inspirational for me for two reasons. First, as an advocate of the #BlackLivesMatter movement a former self-proclaimed, "black evangelical," I was curious to read about the movement's effect on InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (hereafter, InterVarsity), the premier evangelical student organization that had hitherto, maintained a centrist role on the topics of race and social justice.

Secondly, and most importantly, it was uncommon for me to see the subject matter and individuals examined in my research trending on social media. Grant's articles led me to believe that this dissertation on the history of black evangelicals in the black power era will be useful for something other than the successful completion of my doctoral program. This study provides historical context for the content of Tobin Grant's articles. The articles briefly unpack events that occurred at the 2015 InterVarsity triennial student missions conference, Urbana. The conference, which began in 1946, had previously taken place on the campus of the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champagne.[4] However, since 2006, the conference has met in St. Louis.

In the latter of the two articles, Grant gives InterVarsity too much praise for "unabashedly supporting" the #BlackLivesMatter (hereafter, #BLM) movement. Aside from the organization's official statement on #BLM, one must consider that the Edward Jones Dome and the America's Center, the sites of the conference, are located just thirteen miles from the suburb

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[3] See Tobin Grant, "InterVarsity backs #Black Lives Matter at Urbana 15," *Religion News Service*, December 29, 2015, http://religionnews.com/2015/12/29/intervarsity-backs-blacklivesmatters-at-urbana-15/. See also, Tobin Grant, "InterVarsity unabashed support for #BlackLivesMatter may be its boldest move yet," *Religion News* Network, December 30, 2015, http://religionnews.com/2015/12/30/intervarsitys-unabashed-support-blacklivesmatters-may-boldest-move-yet-analysis/.

[4] Keith and Glady Hunt's book*, For Christ and the University: The Story of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship of the U.S.A., 1940-1990* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1991) is the only institutional history to date. The Hunts served the organization in a variety of capacities from the 1960s to the early 2000s.

of Ferguson, Missouri. Grant mentions this, but he fails to tease out the significance of location to the story he is telling. On August 9, 2014, Michael Brown, an unarmed black teen, was shot and killed by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri.[5] Brown's murder sparked a series of protests led by local, national, and international #BLM activists, many of whom make up InterVarsity's primary constituency, college students and clergy. Therefore, one could argue that it was both politically and economically expedient for the conference organizers to ensure that a #BLM activist was included on the roster of speakers for Urbana'15 in consideration of the conference site. Yet, Tobin Grant appears to miss this connection.

There is no evidence to suggest from Grant's pieces or any other source that black students or ministers threatened to protest at Urbana if there was no significant #BLM presence on the conference agenda. However, there stands a reasonable chance that InterVarsity organizers in St. Louis were aware of the impact that #BLM activists were having on the Church of God in Christ's Holy Convocation, which takes place in November each year. Between September and November of 2014, #BLM activists implored Bishop Charles E. Blake, presiding bishop of the denomination, to consider moving the meeting out of St. Louis. The activists noted that the COGIC could support the protests in Ferguson and in St. Louis by moving their conference back to another location, thereby causing the city to lose an estimated $98 million in visitor expenditures spending.

Bishop Blake was initially quiet about the events in Ferguson. However, after mounting public pressure, the bishop released several public statements addressed to city and state

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[5] InterVarsity's official statement on #BLM was not published until two days after Michelle Higgins gave her address. It is unclear with whether the public statement was issued due to the backlash the organization received for allowing #BLM a platform. The official statement can be found online here, http://intervarsity.org/news/intervarsity-and-blacklivesmatter.

officials.[6] Blake's letters indicated that if he was unsatisfied with their plans "to ensure justice is achieved and to make systemic changes," he would consider other locations for the convention after his contract expired in 2016.[7] The bishop also called for the implementation of prayer vigils and #BLM services in COGIC churches as acts of support for the movement.[8] Still, after several meetings with the city in 2015, Blake and his team ultimately decided that the Holy Convocation would remain in St. Louis through 2019.[9]

While #BLM activists were not successful in convincing COGIC leaders to boycott the city of St. Louis, it was surprising that they were able to influence Bishop Blake to respond at all. Blake, like many of his predecessors, rarely commented on matters of race and social justice.[10] InterVarsity's leaders, on the other hand, have publicly maintained a commitment to racial integration since 1944, yet the group has never overtly came out in support of student-led

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[6] Joshua L. Lazard, a writer, minister, and founder of the blog, uppitynegronetwork.com, led the most extensive campaign to force Blake to act. Lazard's, "Open Letter to Bishop Charles E. Blake and the Church of God in Christ," was widely circulated online between October 14, 2014 and the start of Holy Convocation on November 7. That document can be found here at, https://uppitynegronetwork.com/2014/10/14/an-open-letter-to-bishop-charles-e-blake-and-the-church-of-god-in-christ/.

[7] Charles Blake, "COGIC's Letter to Governor Nixon," November 13, 2014, http://www.cogic.org/blog/uncategorized/cogics-letter-to-governor-nixon/.

[8] In preparation for the grand jury's decision on whether or not to indict the police officer who killed Mike Brown, Bishop Blake issued a call for his church to pray and fast for "peace and no lives to be lost," once the decision was announced by the prosecution. Blake's statement, "Ferguson: A Clarion Call," can be found here, http://www.cogic.org/blog/uncategorized/ferguson-a-clarion-call-to-fasting-and-prayer/. #BLM Sunday was held on December 14, 2014, two weeks after the grand jury in St. Louis decided not to indict the police officer who killed Mike Brown. Blake's statement on #BLM can be found here, http://www.cogic.org/blog/uncategorized/blacklivesmatter-sunday/.

[9] See Lilly Fowler's article, "Church of God in Christ convention returning to St. Louis" in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, dated July 20, 2015. The article can be found at, http://www.stltoday.com/lifestyles/faith-and-values/church-of-god-in-christ-convention-returning-to-st-louis/article_e306b6cd-b84d-5f02-bd06-5502cf77f392.html.

[10] The Church of God in Christ has never been at the forefront of civil rights activism. The denomination is mostly noted for its emphasis on spiritual or otherworldly matters. However, Clarence Taylor has highlighted the activist career of Bishop Smallwood Williams in his book, *Black Religious Intellectuals: The Fight for Equality from Jim Crow to the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge, 2002). Further, Jonathan Chism's recent dissertation, "The Saints Go Marching": The Church of God in Christ and the Civil Rights Movement in Memphis, Tennessee, 1954-1968" (Rice University, 2014) also covers several instances in which COGIC bishops encouraged participating in nonviolent direct action. The denomination's central headquarters, Mason Temple, in Memphis was the site of Martin Luther King's last public address, "I've Been to the Mountaintop," on April 3, 1968.

organizations such as the Congress on Racial Equality, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, or any other civil rights organization.[11] When one considers the location of Urbana'15, and the influence of #BLM activists in St. Louis and Ferguson, it was an astute tactical move for InterVarsity leaders to break with its historical stance of neutrality in advance of a possible public conflict with #BLM activists within their ranks.

Grant's articles provides sparse details about Michelle Higgins, the keynote speaker on the second night of Urbana'15. A native of St. Louis and Director of Worship and Outreach at South City Church, Higgins is also involved in several organizations related to #BLM in her hometown. Grant describes how Higgins's address uses U.S. history and evangelical theology to explain the necessity of #BLM. He notes that her R&B-influenced worship band wore #BLM T-shirts on stage. Grant then briefly outlines InterVarsity's history in "multiethnic and multiracial work."[12] Finally, he concludes the second of the two pieces with a brief sketch of Tom Skinner, who spoke at Urbana in December of 1970, and whose life and work is important to the study that follows.

Grant's portrayal of Tom Skinner is fair and accurate, but he only references the evangelist's Urbana appearance to prove his point that InterVarsity's "boldest move" was demonstrated in its embrace of #BLM. For Grant, the inclusion of Skinner at Urbana'70 represents a missed opportunity for InterVarsity because the evangelist's address came after "the

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[11] InterVarsity's Multiethnic Ministry's homepage features an article titled, "The History of InterVarsity's Multiethnic Journey." The piece can be found at, http://mem.intervarsity.org/mem/about-mem/history. As of November 19, 2018, this hyperlink is no longer available. I have attempted to locate another historical article on InterVarsity's Multiethnic Ministries website, but no new article or essay exists.

[12] Tobin Grant, "InterVarsity unabashed support for #BlackLivesMatter may be its boldest move yet," *Religion News* Network, December 30, 2015, http://religionnews.com/2015/12/30/intervarsitys-unabashed-support-blacklivesmatters-may-boldest-move-yet-analysis/.

early battles of the civil rights movement."[13] However, Grant, who is a professor of political science, fails to connect Skinner's participation at Urbana to another important social and political phenomenon, the black power movement. In fairness to Grant, InterVarsity never embraced black power. Nevertheless, the black power movement and its leaders had a profound effect on black students who attended Urbana' 67. Grant points out that black students demanded that InterVarsity make "major reforms" to address racism in the organization.[14] While Grant does not list any of the demands made by black college students, he does note that Tom Skinner's invitation to participate at Urbana'70 came about because of the students' call for change.

Tobin Grant's referencing of Tom Skinner in the 2015 articles is significant because prior to that date, no other journalist had written about Tom Skinner and his Urbana speech since 1996. Edward Gilbreath's biographical essay, "A Prophet out of Harlem," is the only substantial published narrative available on Tom Skinner's life, career, and death.[15] The essay begins by explaining the events that led to Skinner's appearance at Urbana'70. Carl Ellis and a small group of other black college students invited Skinner to the conference because they wanted a speaker who would talk about what it meant to be black and evangelical at the height of the black power movement.[16]

Carl Ellis, who was president of the InterVarsity chapter at Hampton Institute (now, Hampton University), went to Urbana'67 expecting to hear popular white evangelists talk about

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[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Edward Gilbreath, "A Prophet out of Harlem," *Christianity Today* September 16, 1996. The article is available at http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1996/september16/6ta036.html.

[16] Carl Ellis's account of Urbana'67 and Urbana'70 is found in the above Edward Gilbreath article. He and his friends documented their experiences at Urbana in a student promotional video titled, "What Went Down at Urbana'67." The documentary, completed in 1969, can be viewed in its entirety on vimeo.com. It is located here https://vimeo.com/42230364.

discipleship and world evangelizing. However, he also anticipated that there would be plenary speakers who addressed the racial climate in the U.S., and its impact on world evangelism and evangelism in the inner-cities. Furthermore, he and other black students were looking for support as they grappled with how to reconcile their belief in "the white man's religion" with their adoption of militant expressions of "blackness" as represented by Stokely Carmichael, Huey Newton, and other architects of the black power movement in the United States. Instead, they found what Ellis has described as, an "intentionally white event."[17]

Ellis and his fellow students were determined that the next Urbana conference would attend to the racial concerns of black and international students of color. He led a "black students only" prayer vigil at Urbana'67, and the students prayed that, "God would raise up an army of African Americans who would be able to minister to our community, our people."[18] Ellis then joined the national advisory board of InterVarsity and began recruiting black students and speakers to participate at Urbana' 70.

Edward Gilbreath explains that by 1970, Tom Skinner established himself as an internationally known author and radio evangelist. Skinner spoke candidly about social and political conditions in his native Harlem, and about the issues of race and class in white and black churches in America in his books and sermons. A founding member of the National Negro (later, "Black") Evangelical Association and the Harlem Evangelistic Association, Tom Skinner published his memoir, *Black and Free* in 1968. The book offers one of the most salient features of his early ministry, a commitment to reconciling the aims of the black power movement to

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[17] See Gilbreath's article, "A Prophet out of Harlem," *Christianity Today*, September 16, 1996, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1996/september16/6ta036.html.
[18] Ibid.

evangelical Christianity.[19] This commitment was reflected in his subsequent books and in his Urbana address.

Tom Skinner was preceded on the Urbana stage by his Afro-centric worship band, Soul Liberation. They wore afros and West African dashikis. Their song, "Power to the People," infused the Gospel message with black power idioms, and their sound resembled the funk and psychedelic soul popularized by black groups such as Sly and The Family Stone and Parliament Funkadelic. In his speech, "The U.S. Racial Climate and World Evangelism," Tom Skinner provided a history of racial inequality in America.[20] He blasted the evangelical movement for being supportive of slavery and Jim Crow laws. Further, Skinner argued for the necessity of militant, radical black Christians to confront and dismantle racism and its effects on American churches and society. Skinner advocated for an evangelizing mission that upended white supremacy by emphasizing New Testament scriptures that teach that Christians are united, or one in Christ. Therefore, Skinner argued, that racial segregation and white supremacy was diametrically opposed to the Gospel message.

Edward Gilbreath's 1996 article ends by explaining how Skinner's Urbana speech defined his career throughout the seventies. Tom Skinner's appearance at Urbana catapulted him to acclaim in many evangelical circles. However, Skinner's constant criticism of racist white evangelicals, and his insistence on the spiritual significance of militant black activism eventually forced him out of the mainstream evangelical fold. As a result, historians of evangelical

[19] Skinner founded the Harlem Evangelistic Association in 1962. The National Negro Evangelical Association was founded in 1964.

[20] Tom Skinner, "The U.S. Racial Climate and World Evangelism," InterVarsity Urbana Student Missions Conference website, December 1970, https://urbana.org/message/us-racial-crisis-and-world-evangelism.

Christianity in the sixties and seventies have overlooked Tom Skinner and several other black evangelicals who shared his views.

At the time of this writing, Michelle Higgins's Urbana'15 address is unnamed and unavailable in print format. However, the video is available on the video-sharing website, vimeo.com.[21] The site also includes the audio of Tom Skinner's Urbana sermon. Listening to Michelle Higgins and Tom Skinner on vimeo.com is a riveting experience because it is difficult to ignore the striking similarities in their speeches. Forty-five years after Tom Skinner's address at Urbana'70, Michelle Higgins stood before another predominately-white audience at Urbana'15, and practically unpacked the same arguments that Skinner had previously addressed.

Like Skinner before her, Higgins completed four specific tasks to demonstrate what it meant to be black and evangelical in the U.S. First, Higgins had to represent *all* young, black militant activists who identify as evangelical. Second, she had to teach black history and culture to her white sisters and brothers in Christ. Third, she had to use biblical authority to defend black identity and radicalism, and to criticize, chastise, and correct white supremacy within the evangelical religious world. Finally, Higgins had to argue for an evangelizing mission that called for the unity of races and cultures under God.

It is unknown if Michelle Higgins studied Tom Skinner before she took the stage at Urbana'15. However, like Skinner before her, Higgins's speech at Urbana shows that the role of black folk at Urbana, thus far, has been that of teacher, historian, preacher, and bearer of what Cornel West has called, "black prophetic fire."[22] West explains, "A leader is someone who has to

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[21] The link to Higgins's address is here, https://vimeo.com/150226527.

[22] Here I am referencing the title of West and Christa Buschendorf's book, *Black Prophetic Fire* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014). West's definition of the title is found in the next note.

jump in the middle of the fray and be prudential, we hope, rather than opportunistic. But, a prophetic person tells the truth, exposes lies, bears witness, and then, usually, is pushed to the margins or shot dead."[23]

As of 2018, Michelle Higgins continues to write and speak about racism in evangelical ministries and she continues to advocate for the #BLM movement. Furthermore, she continues to serve at South City Church, an interracial evangelical fellowship that appears to support her in her role as a #BLM activist.[24] However, it is still too soon to know and fully assess the implications of Higgins's pro-black activism on her advancement in evangelical ministry. Will Michelle Higgins's black prophetic fire push her to the margins of the evangelical movement as Tom Skinner was for exposing the sin of racism in evangelical organizations while radically advocating for social justice? This study, of course, cannot definitively answer that question.

However, my aim is to recover the voices of Tom Skinner and his peers in the history of evangelicalism in the United States. By recovering their black prophetic evangelical voices, I am establishing a scholarly foundation on which historians of American Christianity can analyze and interpret the work of Michelle Higgins and others of her generation who proclaim themselves, "black evangelicals" in the twenty-first century. This dissertation, *Soul Salvation, Social Liberation*, is one of the first full-length examinations of black evangelical leaders who defined

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[23] West in an interview with NPR titled, "Reviving a Grand Tradition of 'Black Prophetic Fire'" on Weekend Edition Saturday. November 1, 2014. Excerpts can be read and audio of the interview can be accessed here: http://www.npr.org/2014/11/01/360452483/reviving-a-grand-tradition-of-black-prophetic-fire.

[24] Michelle Higgins's father, Mike Higgins, pastors South City Church but according to the church website, the elder board consists of four white men. The deacon board consists of one white woman and four white men. I find the racial dynamics of her church to be rather interesting considering the history of black evangelicals that I document in this study. Higgins's father has a unique opportunity that was unavailable to Tom Skinner and his generation. Black men were often invited to be co-pastors, but not senior pastors of interracial churches. Also, considering the militant stances that continue to shape Michelle Higgins's speaking and writing, I am curious to see if or when the elder and/or deacon board may begin to censor her as black evangelicals have been historically been censored in interracial ministries as this study demonstrates. The church staff site is found here, http://www.southcitychurch.com/home/staff/.

themselves as a both "pro-black" and "pro-evangelical" four decades before #BLM. The study uses the papers, writings, newspaper articles and interviews, and recordings of seven black men as the primary sources for understanding their unique contributions to evangelical Christianity between 1968 and 1979.

Tom Skinner and other black evangelicals emerged during the black power era to define and defend radical expressions of black identity, and to explain their congruence with evangelical theology. These black evangelicals, through their speeches, theological writings, activism, and entrepreneurial practices, have developed what I have termed, a "pro-black biblical hermeneutic and practice" that guided them as they addressed racism within evangelical Christianity. These men not only exposed the hypocrisy of white Christians with respect to matters of prejudice and discrimination, their theological approach also led them to advocate for racial reconciliation, but in a more radical and authentic way.

Both the history and the definition of the term, "racial reconciliation" is rather nebulous.[25] Yet, the term is ubiquitous in the scholarship on race and evangelicalism.[26] Racial

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[25] I developed my definition of racial reconciliation based upon my engagement with works by Brenda Salter McNeil and T. Vaughn Walker. Brenda Salter Mc Neil's 2016 book, *Roadmap to Reconciliation: Moving Communities into Unity, Wholeness, and Justice* (InterVarsity Press) begins with the question, "What is racial reconciliation?" (See page 19). Rather than answering her own question, McNeil first explains that the term means different things for different people. Then she explains that the term is problematic because American history is rife with examples of how unharmonious relationships has been between blacks and whites. She then provides a biblically based definition of "reconciliation," which she explains as "an ongoing spiritual process involving forgiveness, repentance and justice that restores broken relationships and systems to reflect God's original intention for all creation to flourish" (McNeil, 22). This definition does not adequately reflect the experience of the men I discuss in this project. Racial reconciliation was a new concept for them. It appears that their willingness or desire to integrate evangelical ministries was born out of their belief that reconciliation to God through the cross allowed for reconciliation between blacks and white Christians. T. Vaughn Walker's essay, "Cooperative Ministries: A History of Racial Reconciliation," corroborates this thought. The essay also fails to provide a concrete definition of the term. However, Walker documents a series of incidences in which blacks integrated white schools and ministries within the Southern Baptist Convention. The essay is published in *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 8/2 (2004). It can be accessed here http://equip.sbts.edu/publications/journals/journal-of-theology/sbjt-82-summer-2004/cooperative-ministries-a-history-of-racial-reconciliation/.
[26] There are a host of articles and books on the subject of racial reconciliation, race, and evangelical Christianity. Many of them are cited in the bibliography of this text.

reconciliation is used throughout this study to describe the complex process through which black evangelicals sought to create harmonious relationships with white evangelicals that modeled justice and equality for the nation during the post-civil rights era. Tom Skinner's generation of black evangelicals included some of the first to integrate evangelical schools and ministries. They believed that even though harmonious relationships between blacks and whites did not exist throughout American history, that evangelical Christianity affirmed that they were equal with whites before God. Further, they believed that evangelical Christianity, if properly practiced, would serve to unite a racially, politically, economically divided nation. Therefore, black evangelicals willingly accepted opportunities to study, work, and worship with their white sisters and brothers. Yet, many black evangelicals found that their white friends had a different view of how blacks and whites should work cooperatively together in ministry.

For the majority of white evangelicals, racial reconciliation meant allowing black Christians to be present, passive members in their ministries, but not active, independent thinkers and leaders of those organizations. Many white evangelicals wanted to maintain the social power and privileges that their whiteness had afforded them historically in American Christianity and culture. As this study will show, most white evangelicals were resistant to calls to eradicate their perceived superiority over black Christians. For white evangelicals, their whiteness was their religion and their politics. Just as Tom Skinner chided white evangelicals for their skewed perception of race and racial reconciliation in 1970, Michelle Higgins continues to rebuke white evangelicals for maintaining what she calls, a "morally bankrupt" view of racial reconciliation

today.[27] Thus, another role that black evangelicals have played in evangelical ministries is that of an advocate of authentic reconciliation between blacks and whites.

The conflicting views on racial reconciliation between white and black evangelicals during the sixties and seventies created a unique, yet convoluted organizing opportunity for Tom Skinner and his generation of black evangelicals. As the nation was dealing with the aftermath of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination, Skinner and his peers were framing a hermeneutical approach and practice that combined the Southern ideology of "separate but equal" with the beliefs in racial pride and self-determination that defined the black power movement. Because black evangelicals experienced an overwhelming amount of racism in mainstream evangelical ministries, they created their own "separate," all-black ministries, organizations, and businesses to affirm their racial and cultural identities. At the same time, black evangelicals continued to engage in ministries that affirmed their religious identities.

Black evangelicals truly believed that their identity as evangelicals made them spiritually equal with their white counterparts. Therefore, in addition to creating their own separate institutions, black evangelicals continued to facilitate efforts to create integrated spaces for ministry whites. Black evangelicals accomplished this by inviting whites into active participation in black-led institutions, and by accepting offers to work, preach, and worship in predominately-white evangelical organizations.

Aims of the Project, Current Historiography, and Definition of Terms

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[27] See Michelle Higgins article, "The Idea of Racial Reconciliation is Bankrupt: White Supremacy, the Church and How to Move Forward" in *Relevant Magazine*, August 29, 2017 https://relevantmagazine.com/article/michelle-higgins-the-idea-of-racial-reconciliation-is-bankrupt/.

This project is guided by three overarching questions: 1. What role has race played in the proliferation of evangelical Christianity in postwar America? 2. Within the diverse histories of Christianity in the U.S., how do we distinguish black evangelicals from more well-known black preachers, theologians, and activists? 3. How have black evangelicals shaped and reshaped ideologies about the categories of race, religion, and nation? To address these questions, I draw upon insights, ideas, and methods from the fields and subfields of American religious history, African American studies, and women's and gender studies.

In addressing these questions, *Soul Salvation, Social Liberation* not only recovers the prophetic voices of men like Tom Skinner, it provides an important intervention in the current historiography on evangelical history. This study provides the first comprehensive study evangelical Christianity and race that privileges the perspectives of black preachers, writers, activists, and organizers who identified themselves as "black evangelicals" during the post-civil rights era. I offer a more nuanced study of evangelical identity in the sixties and seventies than those studies offered by a host of scholars on evangelicalism published within the last decade.

Matthew Avery Sutton (2009, 2014), Daniel K. Williams (2010), Darren Dochuk (2011), and Randall Balmer (2016) have all emphasized evangelical Christianity's intimate relationship with conservative politics in their respective works. Their studies largely focus on evangelical Christianity's influence on conservative U. S. politics from the 1920s to the gubernatorial terms and presidential elections of Ronald Reagan. These scholars each document the migratory, economic, intellectual, and institutional developments that made postwar Southern California the epicenter of the New Christian Right, a major support base for Reagan and other prominent Republicans over the last four decades. The tight focus on religion and politics found in this scholarship is useful for students of U.S. religious history because those authors demonstrate

how a marginal religious subgroup of "plain- folk," "bible-believing," "born-again" white people became major political and cultural players. Additionally, their works contribute greatly to our understanding of how evangelicals "lived," or practiced their religion.

However, their studies fail to analyze or interpret the category of race in their narratives. This inattention to race is a major oversight for two reasons. First, it implies that to be an evangelical in America in the 1960s and 1970s, a person was automatically—or could only be—middle- to upper-class, Republican, from the Sunbelt region, and white. Darren Dochuk makes several passing references to Tom Skinner in his work, but these references only to serve to highlight the inclusion of black evangelists on Billy Graham's ministry team.[28] Furthermore, the scholarship suggests that when it came to positions of leadership in public settings and in private homes, one also had to be male. Most of the human subjects featured in the aforementioned scholarship are white men.[29] When I began my research on Tom Skinner, I had hoped to recover other black voices from men *and* women who were active in evangelical ministry in the sixties and seventies. Unfortunately, I have only found the writings and papers of black men. This is the only reason why black men from the black power era is featured so prominently in this work. The work of black women evangelicals in the post-civil rights era has yet to be fully recovered.[30]

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[28] See Darren Dochuk, From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011): 210, 380.

[29] Matthew Avery Sutton's 2007 biography of the evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson (1890-1944) is one exception. White evangelical women including Phyllis Schlafly (1924-2016) and Anita Bryant (1940-) often appear in evangelical scholarship because of their political activism within the Religious Right.

[30] Thus far, the only work I have discovered by a black woman during the time-period of this study is Sister Mary Roger Thibodeaux's book, *A Black Nun Looks at Black Power* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1972). I have found that most black evangelical women come in the primary sources as the wives or secretaries of the male evangelists and leaders who published and organized ministries extensively in the sixties and seventies. Ruth Lewis Bentley and Mother Dessie Webster, the only two women who are listed as co-founders of the National Black Evangelical Association, are possible subjects for future studies on black women and evangelical Christianity.

Second, the inattention to race ignores the significant contributions of blacks to the proliferation and reformation of evangelical Christianity during those two decades. In contrast, *Soul Salvation, Social Liberation* offers more insight into the racial, regional, and political diversity of evangelical Christianity at the height of the seventies. Specifically, I explore how shifting notions of blackness during the black power movement shaped the ministries of black evangelicals and the broader evangelical movement. Additionally, this study attends to the categories of gender and sexuality. The black men featured in this study developed ideas about manhood that were influenced by both black power and evangelical Christianity, and those ideas shaped the methods they used to spread the Gospel.

Furthermore, my work challenges the conversations about black identity that are featured in the studies by Peter Heltzel (2009), David Swartz (2014), Brantley W. Gasaway (2014), and Frances Fitzgerald (2017). I document the history of black people who identified themselves as evangelical Christians in the black power era. Further, the subjects in this study spearheaded efforts to make the evangelical movement anti-racist. Peter Heltzel's study of evangelicals and race incorrectly credits Martin Luther King, Jr. as the leading black evangelical who worked to improve relations between blacks and whites. Brantley W. Gasaway and David Swartz correctly identifies Tom Skinner, William Pannell, and John Perkins as black evangelicals. However, both Gasaway and Swartz chose to unpack and emphasize the careers of John Alexander and Jim Wallis, two white evangelicals who advocated for racial justice. Skinner, Pannell and other black evangelicals are presented as supporting cast members in Gasaway and Swartz's stories of

"progressive evangelicalism" rather than as principal actors who worked to address racism and to bring about social justice reforms in the United States.[31]

David Swartz's work further suggests that black evangelicals and other "minorities" impeded the progress of progressive evangelicalism because of what he describes as their overemphasis on "identity politics."[32] Yet, Swartz does not comment on the white supremacist views maintained by white evangelical progressives. Frances Fitzgerald's nearly 700-page volume on the history of evangelicals in the U.S. does not include any black evangelicals in the story. Considering the state of the current scholarship, my dissertation is a necessary mediation because I clarify who the black evangelicals were in the sixties and seventies, and I emphasize their distinct offerings to the evangelical movement. My work fits into an evolving conversation among a diverse group of scholars including, Kerry Pimblott (2016) and Mary Beth Swetnam Mathews (2017) who share my concerns about the racial dynamics of American evangelicalism.[33]

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[31] Alex Schafer's *Countercultural Conservatives: American Evangelicalism from the Postwar Revival to the New Christian Right* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2011) is another notable work on progressive evangelicalism in the sixties and seventies.
[32] See Swartz's article, "Identity Politics and the Fragmenting of the Evangelical Left," *Religion and American Culture 21, no 1* (Winter 2011): 81-120. This come from a chapter titled, "Identity Politics and a Fragmenting Coalition" in Swartz's book, *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in the Age of Conservatism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012): 187-212.
[33] *Doctrine and Race: African American Evangelicals and Fundamentalism Between the Wars* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2017) by Mary Beth Swetnam Mathews, considers the generation before the leaders featured in my work by looking at the period between 1915 and 1941, and examines how black fundamentalists reconciled their conservative views with their activism for racial equality. Kerry Pimblott's book, *Faith in Black Power: Religion, Race, and Resistance in Cairo, Illinois* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2016) moves away from the traditional narratives of the black power movement that begin with Martin Luther King, Stokely Carmichael, and Huey Newton. Pimblott narrows in on local leadership in Cairo, Illinois, offering an analysis of the central role that theologically conservative religious leaders played in the black power movement in that community. While the leaders featured here were not affiliated with the Black Panther Party, or any other civil rights or black power organization, they were influenced by the rhetoric and culture of the black power movement as evident in their diverse methods of evangelizing.

Before I can accurately explain who black evangelicals were, I must first define evangelical religion. D. W. Bebbington (1988) has established one of the most often utilized definitions of "evangelicalism." Bebbington lists four characteristics of evangelical religion: *conversionism*, or the dramatic repentance of sin to faith in Christ; *activism*, or the active dissemination of the Gospel message through preaching, publishing, and other methods; *biblicism*, the belief that all spiritual truth and authority is found in the Bible, and finally, *crucicentrism*, or the reconciliation of God to humanity through Christ on the cross.[34] The black evangelicals that I write about in this study conform to this definition of evangelicalism. Therefore, when the term, "evangelical" or "evangelical Christianity" is used in this work, it is referring to a religion that privileges a born-again conversion experience, the ultimate authority of the bible, the belief that the cross provided for reconciliation between God and humanity, and activism. In addition to "evangelicalism" and "evangelical," the terms "evangelists" and "evangelism" are used throughout the study.

Many of the black evangelicals featured in this study were evangelists, or individuals who "proclaim the good news of forgiveness of sins and new life in Christ."[35] Their primary work was "evangelism." I use "evangelism" and "ministry" interchangeably in the dissertation to explain the work of "proclaiming" and "teaching" the gospel to encourage conversion to Christianity, or to instruct Christians on how to live according to the bible. As the study will show, black evangelicals did not only proclaim the gospel by preaching, but also by writing theological works and organizing ministries. My work interrogates the content and the nature of their evangelism.

[34] D. W. Bebbington's, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (London: Routledge, 1988), 3-17.
[35] Risto A. Ahonen, "Evangelism Challenges the Church's Identity," *International Review of Mission* (2017): 423.

Black *and* white evangelicals in the black power era were primarily concerned with "soul salvation," or preaching and writing to convert people to evangelical Christianity. Their second concern was "social liberation," or applying evangelical Christianity to the social, political, and economic concerns of American citizens. However, as Peter Heltzel aptly points out and this study will demonstrate, social liberation looked different for black and whites in evangelical ministries. Thus, a final intention of this dissertation is to unpack the capricious nature of race and its influence on evangelical identity in the United States.

This study makes the case that black evangelicals in the black power era were challenging the accepted notion that evangelical identity was only assigned to persons who could claim white as a racial identity in the U.S. when they defined themselves as "black evangelicals." Black evangelicals used their bibles to show evangelical identity was principally a spiritual identity, and not only a social conservative American political identity. While black evangelicals were engaged in the political process, they were critical of the Religious Right, a group of evangelicals who supported policies that limited the civil rights of blacks, poor people, and women. This criticism shaped the foundation of their pro-black hermeneutics and practices.

D.W. Bebbington's definition of biblicism informs my use of the term, pro-black biblical hermeneutic and practice, to describe the diverse works of black evangelicals discussed in this dissertation. Ultimately, the writers featured in this study looked to the bible to justify their beliefs about race, racism, and racial reconciliation in the U.S. Biblical passages on spiritual identities, such as "children of God" or "believers in Christ," allowed black evangelicals to reconfigure ideologies about race and Christianity in America. Their own personal experiences with racism colored the ways in which they read these passages. Therefore, we can see in their theological projects a determination to refute the white supremacist views of white evangelicals,

an insistence on the God-ordained dignity of blacks, and an appeal for black and white Christians to privilege their status as "citizens of God's kingdom" over their status as Americans citizens.[36] Their "pro-black" orientations should not be understood as forms of racial prejudice or discrimination. Rather, I argue that their pro-black hermeneutics and practices served to bolster their commitment to the New Testament ideal of "oneness in Christ."

Black Evangelicals?

As I have explained above, the current scholarship suggests that evangelical identity is associated with conservative Christianity, whiteness, and a specific political affiliation and economic class. Therefore, I realize that my use of the term, "black evangelicals" in this study may be confounding for some. However, I use the term for two main reasons. First, I am sensitive to how my subjects chose to define themselves. Secondly, as I have shown in my discussion on the two Urbana conferences, black evangelicalism is distinct from white evangelicalism. In short, black evangelicalism rejects the white supremacist views of white evangelicals.

The historical records I have used for my project show that Tom Skinner's generation began using the term "black evangelical" for three purposes. In addition to embracing the shift from "Negro" to "Black" in the national discourse on black power, by using this term to define themselves, these writers were also challenging the historical conflation of the word, "evangelical" with "whiteness," and therefore with the legal, political, and Christian structures that privileged whites and ignored and oppressed blacks. Albert G. Miller's work on the history

[36] Tom Skinner, like other evangelicals, believed that the function of American churches was to bring about the kingdom of God on earth. Essentially, he saw himself as a "citizen of God," which is why the term is used here. See, Tom Skinner's book*, If Christ is the Answer, What are the Questions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974): 123-127.

of African American Evangelicalism and the founding of the National Negro Evangelical Association in 1963 (later National Black Evangelical Association) demonstrates this shift and this challenge to white evangelicalism.[37] Finally, particularly, in the case of Tom Skinner and his close associate, William Pannell, black evangelicals used the term to differentiate their theological worldviews from other black theologians such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and James Cone.[38]

Scholars such as Peter Heltzel and Charles Marsh (2005) have incorrectly incorporated Martin Luther King, Jr. into their studies on evangelical Christianity and social activism. King is an attractive figure to study because no other twentieth-century black Christian leader had such a profound impact on Christianity, race relations, and politics in the U.S. However, the vast amount of scholarship on King shows that the civil rights leader was not an evangelical Christian. Scholars, Lewis Baldwin (1991) and Rufus Burrow (2005), have noted that King had a low Christology, he rejected biblical literalism, and it is unclear if King considered himself "born again." Martin Luther King, Jr. never spoke of a dramatic conversion experience that was essential to the evangelical experience. To present King as an "evangelical liberal," as Peter Heltzel and others have, is a gross misrepresentation of his life, thought, and work. Heltzel's presentation of King is particularly baffling because it is clear that Heltzel was familiar with Tom Skinner and William Pannell, two men who shared the same theological views of the prominent white evangelicals featured in his book. A cursory engagement with their writings

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[37] See A. G. Miller's chapter, "The Rise of African American Evangelicalism in American Culture" in *Perspectives on American Religion and Culture* ed. Peter Williams (Malden: Blackwell Publishers), 259-269.
[38] Tom Skinner, the most prolific writer featured in this study, viewed King and Cone as more theologically liberal than he was particularly in the realm of biblical interpretation. Further, Skinner understood the necessity of black theology for black liberation in the U.S., but he ultimately dismissed it because he believed that it presented the black experience as absolutely moral and absolutely just. In Skinner's theology, Jesus Christ was the only thoroughly moral and just being.

shows that Skinner and Pannell constantly had to define themselves as authentic evangelicals. Further, they constantly defended Martin Luther King, Jr. from white evangelicals who rejected the leader as a communist sympathizer and a troublemaker.[39]

Therefore, as I continue to use the term, "black evangelicals," throughout this study, I am referring to people of African-descent who conformed to Bebbington's definition of evangelicalism. I am also referring to a group of individuals who identified with the language and the culture of the black power movement, and created ways to engage that movement in their evangelizing missions. Chapters Two, Three, Four, and Five provide examples of how black evangelicals engaged with black power to spread the Gospel.

Implications for Other Fields of Study

In addition to providing an intervention for evangelical histories, this study also has implications for studies on African American Christianity in the twentieth-century. Much of this area of scholarship has focused on the experiences of liberal, progressive black religious leaders and communities from slavery to freedom to the election of President Barack Obama in 2008. One notable example of this work is Barbara Dianne Savage's book, *Your Spirit Walks Beside Us: The Politics of Black Religion.*[40] One of the major arguments that Savage makes in her text is that the term, "black religion" should be understood as heterogeneous, not homogenous. While she does a fine job of showing how blacks embraced mainline Christian denominations and variations of Islam over the twentieth-century, Savage does not sufficiently demonstrate the diversity in which blacks practiced Christianity and engaged in American politics. By

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[39] For example, see Tom Skinner's essay, "What did you think of the life and death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.?" in his book, *Black and Free* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1968): 135-138.
[40] See Barbara Dianne Savage, *Your Spirit Walks Beside Us: The Politics of Black Religion* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008).

illuminating the experiences of black evangelicals in the black power era, I intend to correct this historiographical oversight. For example, Chapter 3 includes an examination of the life and career of William Bentley, a Pentecostal minister who encouraged black evangelicals to nurture their sense of racial pride while respecting the dignity and worth of others.

Until 2017, Albert G. Miller has been the most recognized scholar on the origins and history of black evangelicalism and fundamentalism in the United States.[41] My work extends Miller's institutional histories by looking more closely at individuals who used their ideas about blackness to revolutionize evangelical and U.S. culture through varied publications and the founding of predominately-black evangelistic associations and businesses. These separate and distinct spaces were necessary for black evangelicals when they found that their concerns were not properly addressed in white ministries. At the same time, black evangelicals continued to maintain a commitment to working across racial and cultural lines, as we will see in the chapters that follow.

Gayraud S. Wilmore (1971) and Mark L. Chapman (1996) have both considered the relationship between the civil rights and black power movements and the emergence of black liberation theology and black Christian nationalism. Except for Eldridge Cleaver, the other evangelicals discussed in this study were not major leaders in either movement. However, these movements had a profound impact on how black evangelicals worked for social liberation in their respective ministries, in politics, and in business. Other scholars of these movements, particularly, the black power movement have called for historical projects that consider the relationship between black power and black churches. While this project does not completely

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[41] See Note 25. Mary Beth Swetnam Mathews' study on black fundamentalists will become an important source to reckon with in the history of black Christian conservatives as the historiography progresses.

answer the call issued by Peniel E. Joseph in 2009, it does consider how a group of black Christians related to the black power movement.[42]

Other scholars of African American Christianity have focused on the role that the Exodus narrative has played in shaping black political thought and social activism in the 19th-and 20th-centuries. These scholars include Eddie Glaude (2000), Allen Callahan (2008), and Herbert Marbury (2015). Their works demonstrate that black people looked to the Exodus narrative to define their distinct identity as God's chosen people who would be delivered from captivity. Black evangelicals are largely absent in their works because again, most of the scholarship on African American Christianity tends to focus on liberal, progressive thinkers. However, this dissertation shows that black evangelicals' approach to biblical interpretation is equally important for thinking about how blacks throughout U.S. history have used the bible to influence social change. Their approach to biblical interpretation is also important for thinking about social progress. Where Renita Weems (1991) has explained why formerly enslaved blacks have historically rejected portions of the New Testament used to endorse American slavery, black evangelicals used Pauline scriptures to not only rebuke the racist legacies of American slavery. They also used the New Testament to show that Christianity did not endorse American racial hierarchies and politics. They argued that in Christ, blacks and whites were the same. Where the New Testament had been used to dehumanize the forebears of black evangelicals, they made theological arguments that affirmed their human dignity and spiritual worth to God.

This dissertation also has implications for studies that consider the dynamics between the categories of race, religion, and nation. Henry Goldschmidt (2004) has described the relationship

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[42] See Peniel E. Joseph's article, "The Black Power Movement: A State of the Field," Journal of American History (2009): 751-776.

between those categories as being "co-constituted." Goldschmidt explains that they are "always, already inextricably linked…wholly dependent upon each other for their social existence and symbolic meanings."[43] Eddie Glaude (2000), Danielle Brune Sigler (2004), Morris Davis (2008), and Derek Chang (2010) have all demonstrated how the co-constitution of race, religion, and nation manifested in free black and enslaved biblical interpretation, black religion in the 20th-century, and the re-establishment of the Methodist and Baptist denominations during the aftermath of the civil war. My work considers how black evangelicals approach to evangelism allowed them to implement visions of race, evangelical Christianity, and American identity that were more inclusive and freer from the racism and imperialism that defined white evangelicalism in the civil rights-black power periods.

Ultimately, this dissertation establishes that black evangelical male leaders, through their employment of a pro-black biblical hermeneutic and practice, redefined evangelicalism in three radical ways. First, black evangelicals de-racialized and de-Americanized the religion by discrediting the notion that racism and societal inequalities could be improved by salvation alone. The men in this research project advanced the idea that salvation *and* social justice activism could bring about revolutionary changes in society and the church. Second, their adoption of black power ideologies to create their own spaces and develop their own theological writings within the evangelical movement is significant considering the demonization of radical black activists by the church, the U.S. government, and mainstream media from the "blacklisting" of Paul Robeson during the McCarthy era to the arrest of Angela Davis in 1970.[44]

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[43] Henry Goldschmidt, "Introduction: Race, Nation, and Religion" in *Race, Nation, and Religion in the Americas* edited by Henry Goldschmidt and Elizabeth McAlister (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, Kindle Book): Page 7 of 338, Location 127 of 4978.

[44] Gerald Horne's 2016 book, *Paul Robeson: The Artist as Revolutionary* offers one of the best assessments of Robeson's role as an outspoken critic of capitalism, colonialism, and racism. Robeson, an athlete, lawyer, singer, and actor, lost key endorsements in Hollywood and on Broadway because of his activism. The 1970 arrest of

That black power had a bearing upon how black Christians chose to do ministry speaks volumes about the movement's ability to help black people value their humanity and unique American experiences in spaces where racist, white Christians largely ignored them and overlooked their concerns. Lastly, while many white evangelicals did indeed make great strides towards promoting racial harmony in evangelical ministries as other scholars have pointed out, black evangelicals were the principle architects and practitioners of racial reconciliation theology in evangelical ministries. I utilize insights from W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) and James Baldwin (1963) to help to make sense of the methods black evangelicals used to create new ideas about their identities in their evangelizing missions.

Other categories of identity to be explored in this work are gender and sexuality. Each of the black evangelicals studied in this dissertation are men, and their writings theorize about the usefulness of white Christianity for black manhood and black families. Further, Skinner, Pannell, and Eldridge Cleaver, demonstrate how ideas about race and sex contributed to ongoing racial tensions among evangelicals. Using insights from Gail Bederman (1996) and Steve Estes (2005), I will demonstrate how the category of gender played a critical role in how black evangelicals expressed their racial, religious, and national identities. In short, I argue that my subjects represent a brand of "muscular Christianity" that was at once unapologetically black and unapologetically evangelical.

Angela Davis, an educator and Communist activist, is of note here because it demonstrates the extent to which individuals affiliated with radical activism were criminalized and incarcerated in the U.S. In short, Davis, who had been dismissed by the University of California education system for her affiliation with Communism in 1969, was arrested because guns used in a prison outbreak were registered in her name. Davis was not present during the prison outbreak in which four people, including a federal judge was killed, but she was charged with murder, kidnapping, and conspiracy. Davis and other scholars on the arrest have essentially asserted that Davis was prosecuted so that the state of California could make an example out of her, that radical activism would not be tolerated in the U.S. Other than Davis's autobiography, I think that recent documentaries, *The 13th* and *The Black Power Mixtape* offer excellent insights into Davis's arrest and imprisonment.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 1 examines the rise of evangelical Christianity and the black power movement in postwar America. The lives and careers of Tom Skinner and William Pannell will be discussed in Chapter 2, with particularly attention to the significance of the Tom Skinner Association. Chapter 3 examines the rise of black evangelical theological writing in the seventies. I examine how black evangelicals approached the problem of racism from militant and assimilationist perspectives, and I consider the implications of their positions within the broader evangelical movement. Chapter 4 considers how black evangelicals were able to integrate white evangelical businesses by producing products that sold ideas about black identity. At the same time, black evangelical entrepreneurs were limited by racist attitudes within evangelicalism. Chapter 5 examines how the black evangelicals under review here contributed and conformed to new ideas about black male identity through their writings and organizing. The concluding chapter considers the legacy of black evangelicals in relation to the black power movement. As black power rhetoric and organizing waned by the early 1980s, the publications of black evangelicals on race and Christianity also came to a halt. The final section also considers the current state of black evangelicalism in the United States. I suggest that an embrace of the theological writings of black evangelicals of the seventies might assist those black evangelicals who are still working to upend white supremacy in the evangelical movement today.

Chapter 1

The Makings of Black Evangelicals

"I do not believe that any man, any man, can solve the problems of life without Jesus Christ. There are tremendous marital problems, there are physical problems, there are financial problems. There are problems of sin and havoc that cannot be solved outside of the person of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Have you trusted Christ Jesus as Savior? Tonight, I'm glad to tell you as we close, that the Lord Jesus Christ can be received. Your sins, forgiven. Your burdens, lifted. Your problems, solved by turning your life over to him, repenting of your sins and turning to Jesus Christ as Savior. Shall we pray?"[1]

-Billy Graham, September 1949

"We been saying 'Freedom' for six years and we ain't got nothin'. What we gonna start saying now is black power!"[2]

Stokely Carmichael, June 1966

"We are in the midst of a revolution, and the black brothers on the street are not playing when they say that unless they get justice they will burn the system. Now the question is, Where does the Church stand in the midst of that revolution? What is the message of evangelicalism? What is the message of the Church? What do we have to say to 25 million people who feel shut out of American society?"[3]

-Tom Skinner, April 1970

In this chapter, I situate the ministries of the seven men featured in this dissertation in the religious, cultural, and political milieu of the United States after World War II. I examine two social and cultural forces that molded their identities as black evangelicals. First, I explore the cultural impact of Billy Graham's crusade in Los Angeles in 1949. While there is an overwhelming amount of attention in scholarly and popular accounts on this "watershed event," I argue here that while Graham's rise to national acclaim provided a model for young evangelists

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[1] Billy Graham, *Los Angeles 1949*, Documentary, (A Grace Film Production, 1949). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OEMdPTRdvEI. As of November 19, 2018, this video is no longer available on YouTube.

[2] Michael T. Kaufman, "Stokely Carmichael, Rights Leader Who Coined 'Black power,' Dies at 57," *New York Times* (New York), November 16, 1998. http://www.nytimes.com/1998/11/16/us/stokely-carmichael-rights-leader-who-coined-black-power-dies-at-57.html?_r=0.

[3] Tom Skinner, "Evangelicals and the Black Revolution," *Christianity Today*, April 10, 1970, Box 1, Folder 1, Collection 430, Tom Skinner Papers, Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton College.

to conduct crusades in cities across the U.S. and abroad, he was able to maintain his platform due to his centrist, conservative views about race. While Graham embraced integration on spiritual or theological grounds, he refused to repudiate the legal, historical, and sociological conditions that established and maintained racism in the United States. I argue that Graham's refusal to deal directly with race and racism made it possible for young black preachers and writers who shared his theological worldview to develop their own niche for nationwide and international evangelizing.

Consider the following examples. First, in 1952, Graham told a Jackson, Mississippi newspaper, "We follow the existing social customs in whatever part of the country in which we minister. As far as I have been able to find in study of the Bible, it has nothing to say about segregation or nonsegregation. I came to Jackson only to preach the Bible and not enter into local issues."[4] This statement reflects Graham's approach to the subject of race throughout his lengthy public ministry.[5] Graham was an evangelist. His business, as summed up in the opening quote, was directing people towards repentance. So, he dealt with politics only in relation to his purpose of preaching the Gospel. This is evident in his decision to ban segregated seating at a crusade in another southern city the following year, and in his associations with black preachers in later decades. Where the black evangelical journalist, Edward Gilbreath has interpreted Graham's 1953 Chattanooga crusade as a step "towards dismantling the barriers of racism in the American church," I see Graham's decision towards integrated seating as a sidestepping of the

[4] Quoted in *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* by Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000): 47.
[5] Stephen P. Miller's book, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009) offers a balanced analysis of Graham's racial views that neither raises him up as a great harbinger of racial equality as many evangelical writers are prone to do, nor criticizes Graham too harshly for his cautious embrace of desegregation. Instead, Miller presents Graham's commitment to law and order as key to understanding his relationships with both segregationists and civil rights activists.

broader issues that were facing blacks in their local communities.[6] Graham was invested in evangelizing black folk, but he was not fully committed to their pursuits of justice and equality. This is clear in the second example: his relationship with Martin Luther King, Jr. and the civil rights movement.

Eight years after his Los Angeles campaign, Graham arrived in New York to begin a series of revival at Madison Square Garden. Graham wanted his crusade to reach black communities so he enlisted the support of Gardner C. Taylor, Thomas Kilgore, and Howard O. Jones, who suggested that Graham invite Martin Luther King to participate in the event.[7] Graham invited King with the hope that the noted black preacher would also become an integral part of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA).[8] But, the invitation ultimately led to a friendship rooted in caution and criticism between the evangelist and the minister-activist.[9]

Graham proclaimed King as a friend and Christian brother to encourage racial harmony among Christians in the U.S. But, Graham saw civil rights activism as a threat to law and order, and he often publicly rebuked King and other activists for their nonviolent, civil disobedience to

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[6] Edward Gilbreath's work is important to my research. An editor for *Christianity Today* and several other evangelical publications, his book, *Reconciliation Blues: A Black Evangelical's Inside View of White Christianity* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006) includes one of the first biographical studies on Tom Skinner and William Pannell. Gilbreath's article, "The Apostle Paul and Times: History in the Making-Billy Graham Had A Dream" for *Christianity Today* in 1995 details Graham's career with respect to his impact on race relations. The article can be found here: http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-47/apostle-paul-and-his-times-history-in-making--billy.html.

[7] Gardner Taylor (1918-2015) and Thomas Kilgore (1913-1998) were two prominent black Baptist preachers in Brooklyn and Harlem, respectively, who by 1957, had distinguished themselves as voting rights activists and advocates for school desegregation. Both men served as critical allies for both King and Graham during the fifties and sixties. See Note 13 for more on Howard O. Jones.

[8] Taylor, Kilgore, and Jones served on the planning committee for Graham's New York campaign.

[9] Steven P. Miller (2009) and Grant Wacker (2014) offer similar information on Graham's relationship with King. Wacker offers an interesting summary of the relationship when he states, "Neither man explicitly allied himself the other's work, but the implication seemed clear." See *America's Pastor: Billy Graham and the Shaping of a Nation* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014): 125. I think that the only thing that was clear about their relationship was that both King and Graham were interested in racial harmony, but their tactics toward that ideal differed greatly.

Jim Crow laws.[10] At the same time, Graham praised the legislative gains that came about because of King's activism, and he worked with Presidents Eisenhower and Johnson to garner white southern support for said legislation. King would also reprimand Graham for his decisions to implicitly endorse white supremacy by allowing segregationists to speak at his crusades.[11] While King was not directly addressing Billy Graham in his famous 1963 piece, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," Graham represented the "white moderate" who King deemed more dangerous to black social progress than the Ku Klux Klan and the White Citizens Council. For it was men like Graham, who failed to "understand that law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice."[12]

Graham and King would appear together three other times after the Madison Square Garden Crusade, but it was Howard O. Jones who would eventually become Graham's first full-time black associate at the BGEA in 1958. Jones, a native of Cleveland, Ohio, not only shared Graham's centrist approach to race relations, but also his theological conservatism.[13] Other black preachers would also worked with BGEA as either associates like Jones, or as invited crusade participants, like King. However, a younger generation of black evangelicals, including Tom

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[10] See Steven P. Miller's 2009 book mentioned in Note 5 for examples.

[11] As an example, in 1958, King sent Graham a letter requesting that he reconsider having Price Daniels, the segregationist governor of Texas, participate at a crusade in San Antonio. King argued that if Graham hosted Daniels at the event it would appear as if the evangelist was endorsing "racial segregation and discrimination." Graham went forward with his decision to include Daniels in the campaign, and he would later criticize King for speaking out against the Vietnam War. See "King to Graham, 23 July 1958" at the online Martin Luther King Papers Project, http://okra.stanford.edu/transcription/document_images/Vol04Scans/457_23-July-1958_To%20Billy%20Graham.pdf.

[12] See "Letter from Birmingham City Jail" in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* edited by James Melvin Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1986): 295.

[13] Howard O. Jones (1921-2010) worked with Billy Graham's team until his death. In addition to representing the team in urban neighborhoods, Jones also directed Graham's evangelization efforts in African countries. For a timeline of Jones's life, see The Howard O. Jones Memorial Page on Billy Graham Center Archives site at http://www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/memorial/Jones/Biography.htm. Another prominent black preacher who worked with Graham was Ralph S. Bell (b. 1934). Bell led crusades with the BGEA from 1965 until his retirement in 2004.

Skinner and William Pannell, would eventually split from Graham and the BGEA on the issues of race and activism. Using Graham's evangelism format as a model, Skinner and Pannell created a ministry that addressed the spiritual and social needs of black communities in ways that Graham and other white evangelicals would not.

The second social movement highlighted in this chapter is the black power movement. I consider the origins of the ideology of black power as it originated from the civil rights movement. This section first considers issues within the field of "black power studies" that provides a rationale for why the black power era features so prominently both in this study, and in the works of the men discussed here. Second, I trace the history of black power from the 1966 Meredith March Against Fear to the founding of the first black studies programs in 1968, to demonstrate how this radicalized race consciousness had significant influence on the culture of evangelical Christianity. Black evangelicals did not simply create their own associations to evangelize black communities, they embodied and utilized the organizational tactics, the language, the dress, and the music of black power to also affirm and celebrate race pride and dignity. Except for Eldridge Cleaver, whose work is examined later in the study, no other black evangelicals named in this research had any direct ties to any organization associated with black power. Tom Skinner and William Pannell, however, did have one significant encounter with a religious leader associated with the Black Power Conference in Newark, New Jersey in 1967. I explore that encounter in the next chapter. However, here I am arguing that their appropriation of what I call, "black power culture" helped them to proclaim the "white man's religion" to young, radical blacks. Further, their utilization of black power helped these preachers and writers to present their faith as revolutionary for churches and for American society, to both blacks and whites.

This chapter concludes with an engagement with A. G. Miller's 1999 article, "The Rise of African American Evangelicalism in American Culture."[14] This essay is the standard study on the subject.[15] Miller primarily focuses on the emergence of black denominations and organizations from the early twentieth-century to the late 1950s. I offer a slight intervention in Miller's narrative by focusing in on those "race revolutionaries" who emerged from those institutions to push black evangelicalism beyond preaching and evangelism into the arena of social justice. By offering a fresh reading of Miller's work with Billy Graham and black power in the backdrop, I seek to not only explain how and why black evangelicals were made in the black power era, but to further the unpacking of the rise of black evangelicalism after the 1960s with attention to specific leaders and their ministries.

From L.A., 1949 to 1960s Harlem: From Billy Graham to "The Black Billy Graham"

Darren Dochuk's landmark study, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* offers an incisive analysis on how Southern California emerged as the scene for the marriage of evangelical religion to conservative politics in the 1930s and 1940s.[16] Dochuk traces the migrations of plain-folk southern workers to California, where the growing defense industry promised job security. Initially viewed as outsiders, the populists transformed both their identity and their new region by allaying their racism and fundamentalist separatism, and devoting their efforts to building new churches and

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[14] See, See A. G. Miller's chapter, "The Rise of African American Evangelicalism in American Culture" in *Perspectives on American Religion and Culture* ed. Peter Williams (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1991), 259-269.

[15] As mentioned in the Introduction, the historiography on black evangelicals has recently expanded to include *Doctrine and Race: African American Evangelicals and Fundamentalism Between the Wars* by Mary Beth Swetnam Mathews. This 2017 text considers how conservative black Christians constructed ideologies about race that challenged the racism of their faith tradition.

[16] Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Conservative Evangelicalism* (New York: W. &W. Norton, 2011).

educational institutions to evangelize in the city of Los Angeles and its neighboring communities. These new Southern Californians also transformed their politics. They turned their attention from labor concerns to free market capitalism. By the 1950s, they eschewed the Democrats, a party they believed had sold its soul to New Deal liberalism, and became Republicans. Dochuk explains that despite political setbacks in 1964 with Barry Goldwater's failed presidential run, and Richard Nixon's resignation ten years later, evangelicals from the sunbelt provided the critical votes that elected President Ronald Reagan in 1980.

While Billy Graham plays a minor role in Dochuk's narrative, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt* provides sufficient rationale for helping students of evangelical history understand why Los Angeles was ripe for Graham's arrival in 1949. Among the many new institutions founded by Dochuk's subjects was the Christ for Greater Los Angeles Committee (CGLA), a nondenominational evangelical group comprised mostly of laity from several parachurch organizations including the Christian Businessmen's Committee of L.A., Navigators, Christian Endeavor, and Youth for Christ. Founded in 1943, Christ for Greater Los Angeles hosted over a dozen events that included one-day rallies and week-long seminars in the city during a five-year span. Their events attracted national revivalists such as Hyman Appleman, Jack Shuler, and Merv Rosell.[17] By 1948, CGLA desired to host a more extensive campaign, and they selected as

[17]Very little scholarly information remains on these three evangelists; however, their names are forever linked with Graham in most studies on the Los Angeles Crusade. Hyman Appleman (1902-1983) was a Jewish convert to Christianity, who according to the website of the Conference of Southern Baptist Evangelists, had a profound influence on Billy Graham. See http://www.sbcevangelist.org/Hyman-Appelman.html. As of November 19, 2018, the link is no longer available. Jack Shuler (1918-1962) was a resident of Los Angeles and active with CGLA. He is mentioned in over a dozen studies, but not many biographical details are found. In Graham's *Just as I Am*, Shuler is briefly mentioned. His worship leader, Cliff Barrows joined Graham's team for the first Los Angeles crusade in 1949 and worked with Graham for over sixty years. Finally, Merv Rosell (1913-2001) was a hymn writer and a past president of Youth for Christ. A brief bio and a feature of his pamphlet, *Sing! Above the Clouds* can be found at http://hymncommentary.blogspot.com/2014/03/rev-mervin-e-rosell-above-clouds-youth.html.

their guest preacher, the first full-time evangelist employed by the national headquarters of Youth for Christ (hereafter, YFC), Billy Graham.

Graham was born on a farm in Charlotte, North Carolina on November 7, 1918. After graduating from Wheaton College in 1943, Graham served as a pastor, radio host, and president of Northwestern Bible College in Minneapolis before joining YFC in January of 1945. As the organization's leading evangelist, Graham held rallies throughout the United States and abroad. In the fall of 1947, Graham began holding his own crusades independently of YFC. Graham's crusades typically lasted two-to-three weeks and involved extensive advertising and the cooperation of fellow clergymen in each city. Graham initially declined CGLA's invitation to hold a revival in L.A. when they contacted him in 1948. He had reservations about the budget for the crusade and the lack of clergy participation in CGLA. At the beginning of 1949, the organization gradually met and exceeded Graham's demands. In addition to raising the budget from $7000 to $25,000 and soliciting the support of local churches, CGLA organized prayer meetings to prepare the city for Graham's arrival.

The crusade was scheduled to last from Sunday, September 25 to Sunday, October 16. The site of the revival was near a major shopping center on Washington and Hill Streets, where two large circus tents were set up to accommodate over 6,000 people. In his autobiography, *Just as I Am*, Graham credits the revival's success to "God's doing."[18] However, Grant Wacker has identified five factors that forced CGLA and Graham's team to extend the campaign from three weeks to eight.

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[18] Graham, 158.

In addition to the CGLA's prayer concerts and their hyperbolic advertisements that promised "inspiring music" and "dynamic preaching from America's foremost evangelist," the third factor Grant identified was the looming threat and influence of "the deadly, aggressive, atheistic ideology of communism."[19] In his essay, "Watershed: Los Angeles 1949," Wacker points out that two days before the start of the campaign, President Harry S. Truman announced that the Soviet Union had tested an atomic bomb.[20] That same week saw the communist leader, Mao Zedong take leadership over mainland China. Graham capitalized upon "the Red Scare" by urging his audiences to Christ as their personal savior from impending world devastation. Graham preached, "All across Europe, people know time is running out. Now that Russia has the atomic bomb, the world is in an armament race driving us to destruction."[21]

Graham's staunch anticommunism and fierce patriotism garnered him the attention of media moguls, Henry Luce and William Randolph Hearst.[22] Hearst's famous (albeit, alleged) two-word directive to his editors, "Puff Graham," placed the evangelist and his crusade on the front pages of the *Los Angeles Examiner*, the *Los Angeles Herald*, and countless other local and national newspapers.[23] These reports included coverage of Graham's personal style and his

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[19] Grant Wacker, "Watershed: Los Angeles 1949," originally published in *Christian History*, Issue 111 in 2014. Essay now available in web article format at https://www.christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/watershed-los-angeles-1949/.

[20] Ibid.

[21]Rasmussen, Cecilia, "Billy Graham's star was born at his 1949 revival in Los Angeles." *Los Angeles Times.* September 2, 2007. http://articles.latimes.com/2007/sep/02/local/me-then2.

[22] Graham's anticommunist stance would have also resonated with individuals who associated civil rights activism with Communism.

[23] Wacker's article suggests that the "Puff Graham" directive may have been exaggerated. He notes that no hardcopy of the memo exists, and that Heart's son doubted that his father used that exact phrase to promote Graham. In other studies I have read about Heart's support of Graham-including Graham's autobiography- I have found that there is much emphasis on the fact that Graham and Hearst never directly interacted with one another. I have evidence to suggest that the two men were personally affiliated; however, there is much evidence to suggest that if Graham did indeed speak with Hearst, he would not have publicly disclosed the relationship due to Heart's brazen extramarital affair with Marion Davies. As a devout Christian, Graham would not have openly admitted to being an associate of a man who was involved in an illicit sexual relationship. He explains in his

celebrity influence, the fourth and fifth factors Wacker identifies. Graham's preaching style drew comparisons to celebrated early twentieth-century evangelists, Billy Sunday and D. L. Moody.[24] Further, Graham looked and dressed like a celebrity. The thirty-one-year-old preacher was tall, slender, and dressed in flamboyant suits with wide-brimmed hats and freshly-shined shoes. Graham's southern accent and intellectualism added to his charm. The evangelist also made good use of technological advancements. Graham wore a lapel microphone so that he could pace the stage and connect with audience members instead of remaining behind the podium as he preached.[25]

Finally, Luce and Heart's newspapers reported stories of Graham's influence on celebrities. Among his many converts was Louis Zamperini, an Olympic track star and war hero. Stuart Hamblen and Harvey Fritts, local radio and television personalities respectively, also responded to Graham's call to "take Christ into your heart and be saved."[26] Another noted convert was James Vaus, an electronics expert, who worked for the notorious mobster, Mickey Cohen. Vaus introduced Graham to Cohen. The evangelist attempted to proselytize to the

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autobiography that he was careful about not being implicated in sexual misconduct by "never being alone in the same room with a woman." See *Just as I Am*, 129.

[24] Billy Sunday (1862-1935), a former professional baseball player turned evangelist is renowned for having preached to over a million people and overseeing nearly 300,000 conversions. His informal, theatrical preaching style attracted both converts from across racial, gender, and class lines. See Robert F. Martin's *Hero of the Heartland: Billy Sunday and the Transformation of American Society, 1862-1935* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003) for further information on Sunday. Founder of Moody Bible Institute, Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899) introduced the eschatology of premillennialism and other theological concepts through the use of the press into American Christianity. One recent study on Moody includes, *God's Man for the Gilded Age: D.L. Moody and the Rise of Modern Mass Evangelism* by Bruce J. Evenson. The work was published by Oxford Press in 2003.

[25] In her article for *Religion News Service*, Cathy Lynn Grossman notes that Graham "may have been the first evangelist to use a lapel microphone. See, "Billy Graham, Louis Zamperini and the two nights in 1949 that changed their lives" at http://religionnews.com/2014/12/09/billy-graham-louis-zamperini-two-nights-1949-changed-lives/. The article was published on December 9, 2014.

[26] From Rasmussen's article in *Los Angeles Times.*

gangster over a glass of Coca-Cola in Cohen's home, but to no avail. Besides Cohen, Graham also mingled with Hollywood stars Katherine Hepburn, Spencer Tracy, and Cecil B. DeMille.

The extensive news coverage of Graham's revival meetings and his associations in L.A. proved to an immediate two-fold effect. First, CGLA's dream of evangelizing to larger audiences was finally materialized. Approximately 400,000 people attended the crusade over the eight-week period, and over 6,000 people became converted. Second, the religion of many Southern Californians became a prominent spiritual and culture force in the daily lives of Americans through the charismatic figure of Billy Graham. In the proceeding decades, the L.A. crusade, and Graham's use of mass media to evangelize, would serve as a touchstone for many young evangelists including, Tom Skinner.

I credit Darren Dochuk's *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt* for introducing me to Tom Skinner. Dochuk mentions the black evangelist three brief times in his study, yet his representation of Skinner was provocative enough to encourage additional research. Skinner stands out in the text for three important reasons. First, Dochuk points out that Skinner once traveled with Graham's team. This is significant because in most studies on Graham, the black preachers that are primarily mentioned as his associates are Howard O. Jones and Martin Luther King. Further, during Skinner's early years as an evangelist in Harlem, he was often profiled as "The Black Billy Graham."[27] Skinner's organization, Harlem Evangelistic Association (later renamed Tom Skinner Association in 1968) employed Graham's tactics of dynamic advertising and strategic location for their "Harlem Crusades" in the early 1960s.[28] Dochuk does not mention the

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[27] An example would be James H. Bowman's article, "A Black Billy Graham: Ex-Gang Chief Now Fights Sin" in *Chicago Daily News*. Edward Gilbreath's groundbreaking *Christianity Today* essay, "A Prophet Out of Harlem," further unpacks the "Black Billy Graham" nickname.

[28] See the chapter, "The Harlem Evangelistic Association" in Skinner's memoir, *Black and Free.* William Pannell, who joined the Tom Skinner Association in 1968 details the influence and assistance of Billy Graham's team in an

sobriquet, or Skinner's background in Harlem. However, I find that both Skinner's nickname and his inner-city background provide a framework for Dochuk's two other insights into Skinner's relationship with Graham.

Darren Dochuk explains that after the Watts Riot of 1965, Skinner criticized Graham, E. V. Hill, and other white and black evangelicals who scolded black rioters for their uncivilized disobedience to the law, and asserted that salvation alone could solve their problems.[29] Tom Skinner was born and raised in Harlem. His autobiographies, sermons, and theological writings generally begin with his vivid descriptions of life in the inner-city. For example, his influential memoir, *Black and Free*, begins by explaining the economic exploitation of black people by slumlords, city officials, and police officers.[30] Skinner understood that riots and gang activity came about in response to poverty and political corruption. While Skinner believed that salvation was an important element in bringing about individual changes in blacks and whites, the evangelist argued that the problem of racism in the nation had to be addressed both spiritually and structurally. Skinner charged that riots would continue to surface in inner-cities because evangelical leaders placed too much emphasis on personal redemption and morality, and failed to address the underlying systemic conditions. Where Graham, Hill, and other evangelicals increasingly leaned towards conservative politics, Skinner became associated with the evangelical left.

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interview with Robert Shuster on August 18, 1997. "Interviews of William Pannell." Billy Graham Center Archives. Collection 498.

[29] E. V. Hill (1933-2003) is featured in Dochuk's work as "Conservatism's Great Black Hope," see Dochuk, 285. Hill, pastor of Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church in Watts, Los Angeles, for 42 years came to national prominence as a former supporter of the civil rights movement turned staunch conservative Republican who openly criticized black people for their activism. Hill was dubbed a "race traitor" for supporting "law and order" politics over race reform.

[30] Tom Skinner, *Black and Free* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1968), 23-28.

Dochuk's final insight into Tom Skinner's career is his ideological affinity with Jim Wallis, the founder of the influential organization and magazine, *Sojourners*.[31] Dochuk points to Wallis and Skinner as representatives of the emerging "evangelical Left" during the 1960s and 1970s. Wallis, Skinner, and others of their ilk chastised conservative evangelicals for not confronting poverty, racism, the Vietnam War, or any other social injustice. Dochuk does not fully unpack the political activism of Wallis or Skinner. However, it is clear from the text that Skinner fashioned himself as a radical.

Dochuk quotes Skinner's 1970 manifesto, *Words of Revolution: A Call to Involvement in the Real Revolution*, where the evangelist states, "And any person who receives Christ and His power into his life will also become radical. He can go out into a system in the name of God, directed by godly principles and the Word of God, to change the system."[32] Dochuk's quoting of Skinner ends there. Dochuk effectively uses Skinner's words to show the extent to which Skinner, and Jim Wallis, believed that their version of evangelical faith espoused demands for social justice. While I agree with Dochuk's overall representation of Skinner, I suggest that when this quote is read in its entirety, Skinner's social justice work was informed by both scripture and by the "militant, revolutionary" rhetoric of black power.

In *Words of Revolution*, Skinner goes on to state:

> Make no bones about it, I'm a militant. Make no bones about it, I'm a revolutionary. Make no bones about it, I believe in being radical. The difference between my militancy my radicalism, or my revolutionary concepts and the concepts of other people who claim to be revolutionaries is that my whole revolutionary platform is built on what God says in His Word. It's disciplined by the Word of God and by the Holy Spirit. I responded to that kind of Christ…I discovered that Christ was concerned about hungry people. Christ was

[31] Outside of Wallis's own writings, the most incisive work I've seen on him is the chapter titled, "Jim Wallis and Vietnam" in David R. Swartz's *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 47-67.

[32] This quote is found in Dochuk, 310.

> concerned about poor people. He was concerned about people who were being mistreated. Christ was concerned about freedom and justice. He was concerned about all the things it takes to set men free. For those who took no interest in the needs of men, He had words of judgment…Jesus Christ said, "Depart from me, you workers of evil. I don't know you. I have nothing to do with you."[33]

What Skinner says here is significant for confirming Dochuk's presentation of the young, black evangelical. The quote includes evangelical watchwords, "the Word of God," and "the Holy Spirit" that clearly places Skinner in the same theological vein as Billy Graham. At the same time, and in contrast to Billy Graham, Skinner's quote spells out a Jesus that is not merely interested in salvation, but also in attending to the basic human needs of the oppressed. Skinner's rendering of Christ further confirms his place alongside Jim Wallis, John Alexander, and other evangelical leftists. However, Skinner's quote places him squarely among those of his generation who were heavily influenced by the militant and revolutionary posturing of black power. Again, Skinner was never affiliated with the Nation of Islam, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), or the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP), but his admiration and appreciation for their promotion of racial pride, black history, and the creation of black-owned businesses and institutions is evident in his own intellectual and theological writing and in his evangelism.

In *If Christ is the Answer, What Are the Questions?*, Skinner defines black power as "the political, economical, and social development of the black community by black people from a black frame of reference."[34] Skinner demonstrated his ideological embrace of the movement in his work, *How Black is the Gospel*?, and in his stress on the teaching of black history as a tool to explain the history of white oppression in the U.S.[35] When Skinner founded Tom Skinner

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[33] Tom Skinner, *Words of Revolution: A Call to Involvement in the Real Revolution* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan), 76-77.
[34] Tom Skinner, *If Christ is the Answer, What Are The Questions?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1974), 138.
[35] Tom Skinner, *How Black is the Gospel?* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1970).

Associates in 1968, he and his team were able to capitalize upon black power by incorporating the language and tactics of the budding movement, and thereby produced one of the first examples of what I have termed as a pro-black biblical hermeneutic and practice. Tom Skinner Associates will be discussed at length in the next chapter. Here, I want to transition to a discussion of the field of black power studies. I argue that the black power movement was not entirely "de-Christianized" as other scholars have suggested. Rather, I propose that black evangelicals' adoption of black power culture shows that the black power movement had a small, yet significant influence on evangelical Christianity. I offer a brief history of the movement to explain those elements of black power that proved to be useful to the evangelizing efforts of the men featured in this study.

The Christianization of Black Power

Much of the interdisciplinary scholarship on the civil rights movement reveals an intimate relationship between the black church and activism in African American communities.[36] However, scholarly and popular accounts on black power, suggest that this distinct movement was "de-Christianized." Gayraud S. Wilmore, coined this term in his definitive 1973 text, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, but Judson L. Jeffries offered the most precise definition of the word in 2006.[37] Jeffries explains:

> Another fact worth mentioning is that Christianity did not play a prominent role in the Black Power Movement like it did in the Civil Rights Movement. None of the commonly known leaders of the movement manifested a positive view of Christianity. This is not to say that religion did not have a place within the Black Power movement; it did. Indeed,

[36] The most recent scholarship on black religion, specifically black Christianity and political activism includes, Barbara Dianne Savage's 2008 text *Your Spirits Walk Beside Us: The Politics of Black Religion*.
[37] Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans* is currently in its fourth edition, which was published in 2000. His "de-Christianization" theory suggests that the influence of white conservative ministers on black clergy led to a de-radicalization of the black church and black activism.

> many of the participants were regular churchgoers. A close study of the Black Panther Party, for example, reveals that many Panther chapters had a spiritual advisor—usually a man of the cloth. Moreover, many of their breakfast programs were put in place with the cooperation of local churches. However, for the most part, religion did not figure as prominently in the Black Power Movement as it did in the Civil Rights Movement.[38]

I do not disagree with Jeffries on the limited role of Christianity in the black power movement. Still, his explanation has left me with one question: what impact did black power have on those regular churchgoers that Jefferies mentions? Peniel E. Joseph, founder of the burgeoning field of "black power studies," suggests that black power has had more impact on black churches and Christianity than Jeffries may have noticed. In 2009, Joseph issued a call for historical projects that probe more deeply into the intersections between black power and black churches.[39] Joseph has put forth a worthy challenge for historians, and gradually, a few scholars have taken up the task.[40] However, Joseph's call appears to limit discussions to those black churches most closely associated with historic black denominational life, or those that embraced black liberation theology.

Tom Skinner, William Pannell, Melvin Banks, and Columbus Salley were neither "regular churchgoers," nor do they fit into the traditional understandings of black Christian beliefs and practices. Yet, their writings reveal that black power played a major role in shaping how they preached and proselytized evangelical Christianity to blacks and whites. My interpretation of their theological projects as pro-black biblical hermeneutics allows for both a broader understanding of the scope of black power's influence on Christianity in the U.S., and a more comprehensive view of "black Christianity." Ultimately, the black evangelicals featured in

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[38] Judson L. Jeffries, ed., *Black Power in the Belly of the Beast* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 8.
[39] See Peniel E. Joseph's article, "The Black Power Movement: A State of the Field" in the Journal of American History (2009): 751-776.
[40] One example is the forthcoming work, *Faith in Black Power: Religion, Race, and Resistance in Cairo,* Illinois by Kerry Pimblott to be published by the University Press of Kentucky in January of 2017.

this study saw the movement as not only affirming for the human dignity of black men and women, but black power also helped them to imagine revolutionary possibilities for evangelical Christianity as a social and political force for upending systemic racism in the U.S.

An Overview of Black Power

So, what exactly did young, black evangelical male leaders find attractive about the black power movement? A brief consideration of the history of the movement is helpful here. Elements of black power have been on the American scene since the early nineteenth-century.[41] However, it was not until June 1966 during the Meredith March Against Fear, that the movement came into national view. At 32-years-old, James Meredith was an Air Force veteran and Columbia Law School student, who was first noted among the civil rights community as the first black student to integrate the University of Mississippi.[42] His march against fear was designed as a solo campaign to encourage fellow black Mississippians to resist the fear of white backlash and register to vote. Meredith originally planned to walk 220 miles, from the Peabody Hotel in Memphis, Tennessee to the capitol building in Jackson, Mississippi. Several other black men and a team of journalists joined him at the outset of the campaign. On June 6, the second day of the

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[41] Robert S. Levine (1997), Tunde Adeleke (2003), and other scholars of 19th-century African American history typically point to Martin Delany (1812-1885) as the "Father of Black Nationalism." His 1852 text, *The Condition, The Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* mapped out the first plan for black separatism. However, I would argue that Harriet Tubman (c.1821-1913) and David Walker (1796-1830) were critical forerunners to black nationalism with regard to the issue of black self-defense, which I consider to be a key component to black nationalist thought.

[42] Meredith's efforts to integrate the University of Mississippi were coordinated by prominent Jackson activist, Medgar Evers (1925-1963). Meredith was initially denied admission because his race, and he took his case to the Supreme Court with the assistance of the NAACP. When Meredith was finally granted admission, riots broke out on the campus and two people were killed. For more information see, *The Price of Defiance: James Meredith and the Integration of Ole Miss* by Charles W. Eagles. The book was published by The University of North Carolina Press, 2009.

march, Meredith was shot by a white sniper as he arrived in Hernando, Mississippi. Meredith survived, and several civil rights organizations convened to continue to his march.

Known as "the big five," the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Congress of Racial Equality, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the National Urban League (NUL), agreed to collaborate on the campaign. However, before the march resumed, the NAACP and the NUL pulled out because of SNCC's increasingly militant language and tactics. Stokely Carmichael, the recently elected national chairman of SNCC, had grown weary with both nonviolence as a philosophy and organizing strategy for activism, and with integration as a desired goal of civil rights work. And, he seized upon the national media attention that came along with Martin Luther King, Jr. and the SCLC to begin talking about, "black power," a new system of thought, language, and approach to civil rights activism that drastically differed from the more established and older civil rights leader's methods.

Stokely Carmichael was twenty-five in 1966. He was born in Trinidad, raised in Harlem, and he spent his undergraduate years at Howard University entrenched in civil rights campaigns. Carmichael was a Freedom Rider, he led voter registration drives in Mississippi and Alabama, and was a key strategist for the Selma to Montgomery March in 1965.[43] He was arrested and beaten by cops dozens of times for civil disobedience, and he suffered several mental and emotional breakdowns in his early years as an activist. Still, Carmichael continued to use civil disobedience to defy Jim Crow laws and customs, moving to Lowndes County, Mississippi

[43] The Freedom Riders campaign was mostly compromised of black and white college students and was organized by several organizations including, SNCC, CORE, NAACP, and the Nashville Student Movement. The movement lasted from May-December of 1961, and was designed to challenge southern states' refusal to enforce the desegregation of public buses.

where he was working on voter registration drives in the months before Meredith was shot. At the same time, Carmichael founded the all-black Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO), with several other SNCC members. Known as the "Black Panther Party," the LCFO not only confronted the issue of political representation, it also called for blacks to practice armed self-defense in the state of Mississippi.[44]

By 1966, the entire Magnolia state was nationally known for its efforts to maintain the system of white supremacy at any, and all costs. White, domestic terrorist groups, including the Ku Klux Klan, the White Citizens Council, the Mississippi State Sovereignty Committee, local police departments, and many white citizens had worked collaboratively to incite the fear of voting and integration in black communities through economic reprisals, physical beatings, and murder since the Reconstruction era.[45] The kidnapping and brutal killing of Emmett Till, and the subsequent acquittal of his killers, in Money, Mississippi in 1955, was one of the first incidences to shine a spotlight on the social and political climate in the state, and became an impetus for civil rights activism in the south. As activism increased in the state, assaults on black bodies and media coverage of those assaults was also amplified. Consider the following examples.

On June 9, 1963, Fannie Lou Hamer, a SNCC activist, was arrested and beaten in a Winona, Mississippi jail for working in voter registration campaigns. She would later recall her ordeal on national television at the 1964 Democratic National Convention. Two days after

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[44] For more information on the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, see *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt* (New York: New York University Press, 2009) and Akinyele Omowale Umoja's, *We Will Shoot Back: Armed Resistance in the Mississippi Freedom Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2013). The group's long, that of a black panther, was later adopted by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale when they formed the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense in Oakland in late 1966.

[45] One prominent example of an economic punishment is found in biographies of Fannie Lou Hamer. In addition to losing her job, being jailed and beaten, Hamer was issued $9000 water bill by the city of Ruleville. However, Hamer and her family did not have running water in their home. See Chana Kai Lee's, *For Freedom's Sake: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 40-41.

Hamer was beaten, Medgar Evers was shot in the back as he approached the front door of his home. Coincidentally, his wife and three children were inside watching President John F. Kennedy deliver his speech, "Report to the American People on Civil Rights" on television.[46] Evers, a field secretary for the NAACP in Jackson, worked on the Emmett Till case and was the principle organizer for James Meredith's enrollment at the University of Mississippi in 1962. His assassination was condemned privately by President Kennedy, but Medgar Evers's murderer was publicly hailed as a hero among racists in Mississippi and neighboring states.[47]

One year after Evers was killed, during a project called Freedom Summer, Klansmen in Philadelphia, Mississippi abducted three young civil rights workers, James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman. The case again brought national attention to the state for two reasons. First and foremost, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman were two white men from New York who had traveled to the south to participate in the voter registration efforts. Secondly, the FBI became involved with the missing persons investigation. Had James Chaney, the lone black man in the trio went missing, the FBI would have likely not become involved, despite statutes that placed the crime of kidnapping under federal jurisdiction.[48] Nearly 200 federal agents joined the search for Chaney, Schwerner, and Goodman, and after an anonymous

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[46] This televised speech stated the President's intention to pursue the Civil Rights Bill.

[47] President Kennedy reached out to the Evers family twice after Medgar's death. In addition to sending a telegram of condolence, the President hosted the family at the White House and gave them a copy of the Civil Rights Bill he sent to Congress one week after the assassination. Evers's autobiography, an assemblage of letters and speeches, edited by his widow and Dr. Manning Marable includes documents and recollections of these interactions between Kennedy and the Evers family. Further, it has been widely reported that De La Beckwith was greeted by Governor Ross Barnett at his second trial. At the time, Myrlie Evers was on the stand testifying about her husband's work with the NAACP. She would not receive justice for her husband's murder for another three decades as De La Beckwith was finally convicted and imprisoned in 1994.

[48] Many in the civil rights community, including Rita Schwerner, the widow of Michael Schwerner, believed that the case gained national attention because Michael and Andrew were white men from New York. Rita explained, "My husband did not die in vain. If he and Andrew had been Negroes, the world would have taken little notice of their deaths. After all, the slaying of a Negro in Mississippi is not news. It is only because my husband and Andrew were white that the national alarm was sounded." See the article, "A Brutal Loss, but an Enduring Conviction" by Nikole Hannah-Jones at https://www.propublica.org/article/a-brutal-loss-but-an-enduring-conviction.

tip was called in their bodies were found, shot and burned, on August 4, 1964, forty-four days after they were reported missing.

From these very brief highlights of political violence that characterized the state of Mississippi in the sixties, we can infer that the day-to-day realities of black Mississippians and civil rights workers were governed by caution and fear. Then, Stokely Carmichael appeared on the scene. Carmichael had followed the way of King and nonviolence since he was a teenager. However, in his mid-twenties, he found that nonviolent activism was consistently met with violence and death. The shooting of James Meredith, coupled with his own repeated personal experience of police brutality ten days after the March Against Fear began, forced Carmichael to bring national attention to the aims of the LCFO.

On the morning of June 16, 1966, Stokely Carmichael was setting up a rest stop for marchers at a local public school, as he had been given the proper clearance to use the property. However, as the march progressed, city officials quietly withdrew the permits, and Carmichael was ordered to leave the grounds. He proceeded with setting up, and he was swiftly beaten and arrested. By nightfall, the young leader had posted bail and returned to the school to address the crowd. Carmichael explained:

> This is the 27th time I have been arrested and I ain't going to jail no more! The only way we gonna stop them men from whuppin' us is to take over. What we gonna start sayin' now is Black Power! The white folks in the state of Mississippi ain't nothing but a bunch of racists. Every courthouse in Mississippi out to be burned down to get rid of the dirt.[49]

Carmichael then transformed himself into a country preacher, utilizing the tactic of call and response, shouting out, "What do we want?" The crowd answered with, "Black Power!" In this

[49] "Mississippi Reduces Police Protection for Marchers," *The New York Times*, June 17, 1966.

manner, the black power movement was born and the slogans and methods associated with King and his nonviolent campaigns began to drift into the background.[50]

Stokely Carmichael and the LCFO originally connected black power to the need for black Mississippians to resist the attitudes of fear and docility, utilize self-defense, and to organize economically and politically to sustain their own communities. However, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale took the term and the concept of black power and organized it into a national call for political, economic, and cultural power. Inspired by Malcolm X, Karl Marx, Mao Zedong, and Stokely Carmichael, Newton and Seale formed the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP) on October 15, 1966, exactly four months after the Greenwood rally.[51] In addition to implementing community programming to eradicate poverty, hunger, and illiteracy, the BPP members were renowned for their unprecedented level of bravado and radical self-expression. Media images regularly showed the BPP decked out in black berets and black leather jackets, and armed with shotguns as they marched around their neighborhoods and state buildings demanding justice for black and brown people.

The BPP personification of the fearlessness that Carmichael called for in Greenwood, elevated them to hero status among young, politically aware individuals across the nation. They terrified white conservatives. When in 1968, students at the University of California, Berkeley

[50] The documentaries, *Citizen King* and *Eyes on the Prize: Volume 4* both do an excellent job of depicting the mounting tension between Martin Luther King's SCLC and Carmichael's SNCC. In short, by 1966, King and the SCLC were losing momentum with its southern constituency, and King directed the organization's attention to northern cities, namely Chicago to address the issues of poverty and racism there. SNCC remained largely active in Mississippi. Its members were attempting to engage poor, black people who were afraid to register to vote for fear of losing their livelihoods and/or their lives. SNCC, under the direction of Carmichael, had also become disillusioned by integration and began expelling its white membership and embracing the more radical teachings of Malcolm X. This shift in ideology placed Carmichael in direct conflict with King, and Carmichael used the Meredith March as an opportunity to exploit this tension before the national media.

[51] Bloom and Martin (2014) offers the most comprehensive study of the origins and influences of the BPP.

petitioned to have the Panthers' Minister of Information, Eldridge Cleaver, appointed as a faculty member, Governor Ronald Reagan vehemently opposed their request. The future president famously retorted, "If Eldridge Cleaver is allowed to teach our children, they may come home one night and slit our throats."[52]

Carmichael and the BPP's call for, and embodiment of black power, had implications outside of the political and economic arenas.[53] Black Power spawned cultural, educational, and theological revolutions as well. Amiri Baraka's Black Arts Movement was budding in 1966. Baraka's call to black novelists, playwrights, and other artists to produce works that reflected pride in black history and culture was heard and heeded by the likes of Nikki Giovanni, Gil Scott-Heron, Sonia Sanchez, and scores of others.[54] The music of The Staples Singers and Curtis Mayfield asserted "blackness" in soulful, funky sounds that not only moved bodies, but also made them think about the political and social climates they occupied. For example, James Brown's major hits, "Say It Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud," "I Don't Want Nobody to Give Me Nothin'," and "Funky President," emphasized black pride and black economic independence. Black celebrities began wearing Afros and dashikis, and raising their fists, helping to usher in black power fashion trends and posturing.[55] Further, black students demanded changes in college and university curriculums. In 1968, San Francisco State University opened the nation's first black studies department. Beginning in that same year through the late 1970s, Tom Skinner,

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[52] See Eldridge Cleaver's *Post-Prison Writings and Speeches*, 111.
[53] The black power era saw the election of several "first black mayors" throughout the country. Carl Stokes (1927-1996) election as mayor of Cleveland in 1967 distinguished him as the first black to lead a major city, however, Richard G. Hatcher of Gary, Indiana was elected to office just days before Stokes.
[54] Prominent studies on the Black Arts Movement includes James Smethurst (2005) and John Bracey and Sonia Sanchez (2014).
[55] V.L. Giddings (1990), Douglas Hartmann (1996) Sandra Hernandez (1999), and Jeffrey Ogbar (2004) all provide valuable insights into the fashion and posturing that came into vogue during the black power movement.

William Pannell, and Columbus Salley began writing about black power's relationship to evangelical Christianity.

Skinner, Pannell, and Salley had much common with the leaders of the black power movement. They were young, educated, male, and black. Further, they were infuriated by the state of race relations in the United States. Rather than turn to the BPP, black evangelicals picked up their bibles and began interpreting the scriptures with black consciousness and white racism in mind. Their pro-black biblical interpretation, and the ways in which they applied their hermeneutics ultimately Christianized black power and revolutionized evangelicalism. In their theological imaginations, Jesus was a radical who could identify with, and liberated blacks and whites from racism, poverty, and other earthly, American injustices. The unique perspectives, motives, and work of Skinner, Pannell, Salley, and the other men discussed here are critical to understanding the history of black evangelicalism in the United States. While A. G. Miller's work on the subject remains the standard, I suggest when we add these men to his story, these "race revolutionaries" as Miller calls them, we have a more complete understanding of the story beyond the founding of the National Negro Evangelical Association (NNEA) in 1963.

Reconsidering "The Rise of African American Evangelicalism in American Culture"

A.G. Miller's touchstone essay, "The Rise of African American Evangelicalism in American Culture" offers an excellent, concise analysis of the history of black evangelicalism. Miller begins the piece by describing the challenges facing scholars who attempt to define black evangelicals. First, these particular blacks of Christian faith do not fit easily into historic, or traditional black denominational life, making it difficult to trace their origins. Second, Miller acknowledges the "diversity and intricacy" of evangelicalism, a religious movement that is also difficult to define. To overcome these obstacles, Miller cites the founding of the NNEA (later,

the National Black Evangelical Association) in 1963 as the clearest manifestation of black evangelicalism in American culture. However, he suggests that black evangelicals emerged several decades before. Miller points to the Scopes trial of 1925, an event that placed fundamentalist Christian creationism in conflict with evolutionism, as the beginning of the modern movement of evangelical Christianity, and he notes that the founding of the National Evangelical Association in 1943, formally institutionalized the movement.

Miller moves on to identify and analyze two definitive strands in the historiography of black evangelicalism. The first strand moves from the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century evangelical roots of black denominational life to the founding of the NNEA. Miller identifies this strand as problematic because it ignores critical precursors to the NNEA. The second strand, Miller explains, attends to those years before 1963. However, Miller contends that scholars in this strand do not adequately attend to the "specific forces that led to the formation" of the NNEA, and incorrectly uses the term "bible believers" to include all black Christians without attention to those who interpret the bible liberally.[56]

Miller corrects both strands in the historiography by unpacking three movements that contributed to the creation of the NNEA. He primarily focuses on the formation of black Plymouth Brethren churches in the U.S. in 1914. B.M. Nottage, the main evangelist for this movement, preached theological fundamentalism and criticized the liberalism and emotionalism of traditional black churches. I suspect that Miller devotes much of his article to Nottage not only because of his example of early black fundamentalism in the U.S., but also because he was a theological mentor to many founders of the NNEA including William Pannell and William H.

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[56] See A. G. Miller's chapter, "The Rise of African American Evangelicalism in American Culture" in *Perspectives on American Religion and Culture* ed. Peter Williams (Malden: Blackwell Publishers), 261.

Bentley.[57] Miller then moves to a brief examination of the creation of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) in the 1880s where he explains that though the denomination was originally founded as a missionary cooperative between blacks and whites, by 1940, the organization withdrew support for black missionaries in West Africa. As a result, black churches within the denomination became advocates of black self-reliance to support their own missionary projects. Finally, Miller teases out the significance of COGIC's status as the only black denomination free of white control or affiliation, and its emphasis on an educated clergy.

Miller notes that the COGIC was distinguished from other black bible-believers because they also stressed sanctification, or speaking in tongues as a requirement for salvation. To downplay the notion that sanctification made black Pentecostals appear "overly emotional" or "other-worldly," denominational leaders increasingly stressed the importance of a seminary-trained clergy. Among the first black Pentecostals to respond to this call was William H. Bentley, the first African American to receive a Bachelor of Divinity from Fuller Theological Seminary in 1959, and founding member of the NNEA. Bentley served as its president from 1970 to 1976. I examine Bentley's life and work in Chapter 3.

Miller does not pinpoint exactly when the NNEA replaced the word "Negro" with "Black." However, William Bentley's institutional history of the NNEA states that the shift occurred in 1974, nearly a decade after Stokely Carmichael's address in Greenwood, Mississippi.[58] Miller however, does explain:

> Originally, in 1963, the NBEA did not view itself as racially separatist, although since then it has been a predominately black association. It did see itself as an association

[57] Pannell describes Nottage's influence on his life in an interview with Robert Shuster on August 18, 1997. "Interviews of William Pannell." Billy Graham Center Archives. Collection 498.

[58] See Chapter 3 of this study for more details about the NNEA's relationship with the black power movement.

> which focused its efforts on developing African-American leaders who would minister to blacks in strongly fundamentalist way. From the beginning the social action commission raised social issues within the NBEA, yet major social concerns were not in the forefront. The NBEA concentrated instead on strategies for spreading its particular brand of Evangelicalism within the African-American community. During this early stage, many black evangelicals were frustrated with the white evangelical movement. This tension primarily sprang from what blacks perceived as white evangelicals' indifference and lack of sympathy for the evangelistic needs of African Americans. This eventually led some black evangelicals to charge their white counterparts with a spiritual "benign neglect." Eventually the charge of neglect evolved into a stronger allegation of racism.[59]

With this concise conversation on race and the NBEA, Miller invites two questions for future research. First, why has the NBEA remained a predominately black, or black separatist organization? Second, how did the NBEA and its affiliates choose to address racism in the broader evangelical movement after 1963? To answer these questions, one must move beyond the rise of black evangelicals after the founding of the NBEA, and look to those young, black evangelicals who emerged from the ranks of that organization to tackle the subject of race and social justice as those topics came to the fore in national conversations. The next four chapters consider what became of black evangelicalism after 1963 during the height of the black power movement. Essentially, many black evangelicals became militant "race revolutionaries" who, disrupted the racial politics favored by Billy Graham as outlined in this chapter. These men were both pro-black and pro-evangelical.

The material covered in this chapter provides a brief overview for what it meant for black evangelicals to be both pro-black and pro-evangelical. Unlike the BGEA, black evangelicals went into black communities and preached the Gospel in a manner that resonated with people who were trying to gain political and economic power for themselves. Further, black evangelicals consistently criticized white supremacy in U.S. politics and evangelical culture.

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[59] See A. G. Miller's chapter, "The Rise of African American Evangelicalism in American Culture" in *Perspectives on American Religion and Culture* ed. Peter Williams (Malden: Blackwell Publishers), 265.

Finally, these men preached a message of racial reconciliation that did not simply call for racial harmony, but for justice, equality, and power. They were no longer content as the black representatives of mainstream evangelical ministries like Graham's association or YFC. These men created their own organizations that affirmed their identities as blacks and as evangelical Christians.

CHAPTER 2

Evangelizing from a Black Perspective

"[I] was powerfully affected by the riots that shook the cities in the summer of 66…65, 66, 67…starting in Watts and moving throughout the country. When it finally got to Detroit, that was an awesome experience. It was a real shock kind of an experience…we were impacted by that… It said to me that something very radical had happened in human relations in this country. Particularly in cities. That quite probably the black community had turned a corner in its relations with the white community. It suggested to me that an association with an all-white organization might not be the right way to function post urban unrest. And since there didn't seem to be an awful lot of commitment in those organizations anyhow…it seemed that it might be time for an African American evangelistic organization to take shape…the upheavals of the mid-sixties had awakened a number of us to the possibility, the probability, and the desirability of an enlarged evangelistic ministry from a purely African American perspective."[1]

-William Pannell, August 2003

Pro-Black and Pro-Evangelical

The last chapter ended with an examination of A.G. Miller's history of black evangelicalism from around 1925 to 1963, the year that the National Negro Evangelical Association was founded. This chapter attempts to expand upon that history by documenting and interpreting what happened in black evangelicalism after that organization was formed. Here, an examination of the lives and ministries of William Pannell and Tom Skinner is necessary. These men are generally glossed over in histories of evangelicalism when the topics of race relations and politics arise. This is true in Peter Heltzel's 2009 study, *Jesus and Justice: Evangelicals, Race, and American Politics*, and David Swartz's 2012 book, *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism.* Where Heltzel incorrectly identifies Martin Luther King, Jr. as a representative of black evangelicalism, Swartz chooses a white civil rights activist, John Alexander, to examine as the leading voice for racial justice in the evangelical movement.[2] The

[1] Robert Schuster, "Tape 6," August 18, 2003, in *Interviews of William E. Pannell-Collection 498 at Billy Graham Center Archives at Wheaton College*, MP3 audio, 1:32:46, https://ensemble.wheaton.edu/hapi/v1/contents/permalinks/Jn5o8PFp/view.

[2] Swartz's article, "Identity Politics and the Fragmenting of the 1970s Evangelical Left," which later formed a chapter of his book, succinctly explains why the author chose to emphasize John Alexander over a figure like

historiography as it stands assumes that blacks, who embraced evangelical, conservative Christianity, did not make significant spiritual and political contributions to evangelicalism and to American society and culture. So, in a sense, the biographies of Pannell and Skinner included below are presented as an act of recovery of the lost, or rather, ignored voices of evangelical Christianity. Ultimately, Skinner and Pannell proved to be too radical, too militant for white Christians, as they were pro-black and pro-evangelical. This chapter not only explores the rise of the Tom Skinner Association (TSA), but also considers why the organization was eventually maligned within the broader evangelical movement. The alienation of the TSA as an organization as whole, and of Tom Skinner, as an individual, is perhaps why he and Pannell have been overlooked for serious intellectual inquiry. Yet, there is much to analyze in their personal papers and collections that adds a greater understanding of the history of American Christianity.

Between 1995 and 2007, William Pannell sat down with the archivist, Robert Shuster of the Billy Graham Center in Wheaton, Illinois, to discuss his lengthy career as an organizer,

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Skinner or Pannell, in his discussion on race. Swartz argues that "identity politics" sabotaged efforts for a united political front for the evangelical left. John Alexander was a figure who advocated for racial justice, without being too invested in affirming black identity in the same way that Skinner and Pannell were. In other words, Alexander was not a militant and did not criticize white men as harshly as black evangelicals did. The article can be found in *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 21:1 (Winter 2011): 81-120. Interestingly, in his chapter on Alexander in the book, Swartz quotes him as stating that his original interest in working with blacks was to be their savior. Alexander is quoted as writing, "I came as a white knight to save blacks from their oppressors. It did not occur to me that I was one of their oppressors." What is interesting about that line is that Swartz ultimately presents Alexander as a knight or a savior figure to black evangelicals. Swartz spends most of the chapter writing about black evangelicals, most of whom are under review here, who contributed to Alexander's magazine, *Freedom Now.* Swartz credits Alexander with giving them "an introduction" to white evangelicalism, when in fact, these men were active in evangelical ministries prior to 1965, when the magazine was founded. Swartz could have just written about the difficulties that black evangelicals faced in their fight for racial justice in evangelicalism. It seems to me that he overlooked the fact that "evangelical" is also tied up in "identity politics," and the overwhelming whiteness and white maleness of the movement is actually the cause of the fracturing of the evangelical left. The groups he identified in his article, black men, white women, Asian men, and those with more liberal interpretations of evangelical theology, continued "to splinter the evangelical left" (Swartz's words, not mine) because their concerns were never properly addressed and resolved by leftist, evangelical white males who held most of the power in evangelical ministries in the same capacity that white evangelical men who aligned themselves with the right.

evangelist, and professor in evangelical institutions over the span of four decades.[3] Pannell's interviews, writings, and papers—along with those of Tom Skinner's—form the basis of the source material for this chapter. Ultimately, this chapter will turn attention to the personal convictions and social conditions that prompted Skinner and Pannell to collaborate in launching the TSA in Newark, New Jersey in 1968. Though the organization was short-lived, I argue that the TSA represents the most significant development in the history of black evangelicalism after 1963. Unlike the NNEA, which was founded in 1963, the TSA was the first all-black evangelical ministry. No white evangelists represented the organization. Further, the TSA was the first evangelistic association to host evangelistic events in urban areas, and not in suburbia, the preferred locations of most white evangelists. Finally, where previous evangelical ministries refused to engage fully with ideas coming out of the civil rights and black power movements, the TSA embraced ideological tenets of those movements and blended them with evangelical Christianity.

The TSA was not only the first all-black evangelistic association; its mission was shaped in direct response to the Newark Riot of 1967 and the first Black Power Conference that was held in the city one week after the riot. For the first time in evangelical history post-1945, evangelical Christians were responding to political and social activists with care and concern. Pannell and Skinner were not like Billy Graham and E.V. Hill, who criticized rioters, preached law and order, and prescribed salvation as the primary means to solve all their problems. Pannell and Skinner sought to understand and explain why young, black people were rioting in the cities,

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[3] This under-utilized collection is not only valuable for research on William Pannell and Tom Skinner. Pannell's oral history includes information on a variety of evangelical leaders and institutions he encountered over the span of 40 years. I will not only draw upon Pannell for this chapter, but also Chapters 3 and 4. Robert Schuster also interviewed Tom Skinner, but his oral histories are incomplete. I believe that, considering the intermittent nature of Schuster and Pannell's recording sessions, Schuster may not have had another opportunity to interview Skinner before he died in 1994.

and why the message of black power resonated with them. Then, they went about shaping their evangelistic approach to address the structural conditions that caused urban rebellions, and they used the Gospel to affirm both black identity and pride, and to stress the need for whites and blacks to be reconciled in Christ and in matters of justice. Their evangelism efforts in the TSA was not limited to preaching revivals; both men wrote and published on race, religion, and society.

To unpack my argument, I first need to attend to one basic questions: What more can we learn from the biographical information available on William Pannell and Tom Skinner to understand their approach to evangelical ministry? In answering this simple question, more complex questions arise: Why did the concept of race become such an essential feature of William Pannell and Tom Skinner's evangelizing mission? What can we learn about the nature of race in the civil rights-black power era by examining their ministry and writing? Who were their primary audiences for their publications and their evangelistic events? What do we learn about evangelical culture through the lenses of Pannell and Skinner? To answer these questions, I examine their memoirs and interviews to analyze how they came to understand race in the U.S., and themselves as racialized American citizens. I will then examine articles and promotional literature from the TSA, and Skinner and Pannell's sermons, speeches, and writings as examples of the development of a pro-black biblical hermeneutic and practice that characterized black evangelical ministries.

I utilize the insights from scholars and intellectuals who have written on race and religion in the U.S. to interrogate the concept of "pro-blackness." Specifically, I am attempting to unpack how these two evangelists constructed a concept of blackness in response to white supremacy and color-blind racism in evangelicalism that both reflected and defected from the concept of

blackness that was being touted within the black power movement. In other words, how did they use their religion to confront the way race was created and maintained in the U.S., and how did they go about the process of recreating race? What was the significance of evangelism from a "purely African American perspective"?

***My Friend, The Enemy*: William Pannell on Race, Language, and Power**

William Pannell discovered his official "race" when he was 37-years-old. Pannell was preparing for a speaking engagement at the 1966 World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin, and he went about the business of securing a passport. It was during this process that he obtained his birth certificate. He would later write of the document:

> I suppose people react differently to their birth certificates. Mine was rather routine and I scanned it and was reassured. The parental names were correct as was the date, month, and day. What stunned me, as I have earlier suggested, was the little square marked, "Race." You got three choices that year-white, black and mulatto. Kinda like ordering a sundae. Well, it seems I am black-or so it was in 1929. I'm not today, if by black you mean black. That is, if you're talking about color-spectrum absolutes. I hate to refute the considered opinion of that hospital staff, but I was not, am not, and never will be black. My mother was not black, my father was not black, and that ought to tell you something. But since they were not pure white either-assuming there is such a person (and according to current detergent industry standards, there isn't)-I am somewhere in the middle. Neither black nor white. And to be neither white nor black in America is bad news.[4]

What Pannell is teasing out here goes beyond the conundrum of his fair skin pigmentation being labeled as, "black." His problem was that he had to come to terms with what that label represented about his status, his identity, his destiny, and his value and worth both as an American citizen and as an evangelist in the U.S. living in the 1960s. I understand this. Yet, I find it perplexing that this was the moment in Pannell's life that concretized the reality of race for him. His memoir suggests that he was constantly faced with daily reminders of how race shaped his life.

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[4] William Pannell, *My Friend, The Enemy* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1968): 91-92.

Figure 2.1 William Pannell. “That Was Then, This Is Now.” *Fuller Studio Online.*

What is the “reality of race”? I am not suggesting that race is real because there are biological factors, such as genetic sequences, for example, that makes a person black or white or Korean. Scholarship and writing from the 1980s onward has shown that there is no biological basis for race.[5] I have been most influenced by the work of Barbara J. Fields, Matthew Frye Jacobson, and James Baldwin. These intellectuals have demonstrated that race is real in the racist, ideological imaginations of those who have assumed and inherited the power to create, influence, and enforce American laws and customs from the 17th-century to the present. Furthermore, race is real in the everyday lives of those who are severely and significantly impacted by those laws and customs. In other words, race is real because racism is at once the player and the product of those laws and customs.

American lawmakers, at every level of government, have decided who can own land, who can vote, who can marry, who can live and work in particular spaces, who can perform a variety of other everyday actions, and who can occupy a variety of other everyday places. Their

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[5] Examples I am thinking of here includes enduring works such as, Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: Norton, 1981), Richard Lewontin, Steven Rose, and Leon Kamin, *Not in Our Genes: Biology, Ideology, and Human Nature* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), and more recent studies such as, *The Myth of Race: The Troubling Persistence of an Unscientific Idea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014) by Robert Wald Sussman.

deliberations led to the creation of racial classifications, or social categories that organized humans around historical, linguistic, and ethnic similarities and differences. What is clear from Fields and Jacobson is that those who have been privileged to freely live, work, vote, etc., as they pleased, have been categorized as "white." Furthermore, what is clear is that those who are considered white benefit from the racist cultural and political edges that privileges whiteness as the norm and center.

What is missing from the work of Fields and Jacobson, specifically, is a clear analysis of the nuances of class, gender and sexuality in that category. When we consider the naturalization law of 1790 and changes in state laws after 1856, we know that "whiteness" was originally associated with "masculine identity" and "landowning class status" as prerequisites for civil liberties and freedoms. In other words, white men have historically enjoyed the most social and political freedom in the U.S. These oversights aside, Fields's influential and enduring essay, "Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the United States of America" is useful for continuing to think about how the law created inferior social categories for nonwhites.[6] As the language of the law has shifted from "servant for life" to "slave codes" to "black codes" to "Jim Crow" to "segregation," American lawmakers—and their enforcers—have consistently ensured that white men in the U.S. have had unparalleled access to civil rights and social freedoms. Undoubtedly, this is because white men have been the most consistent creators, interpreters, influencers, and enforcers of American law and customs.

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[6] A version of this essay was originally published in 1982 in an essay collection published in honor of C. Vann Woodard. The most popular version of the piece can be found in *New Left Review* 181 (May/June 1990): 95-118. Fields recently republished it in another edited volume co-authored by her sister, Karen E. Fields, a sociologist. The book is titled, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (New York: Verso, 2012).

Though I have emphasized “white men” above, I realize that whiteness is not a stable category. Jacobson’s history of European immigration carefully teases out the nuances of white identity and its relationship to social and political power in the United States from the 1790 to the rise of the 20th-century civil rights movement. One group that Jacobson examines in his text is Italian immigrants. The author demonstrates how this specific set of immigrants held a “racial middle ground” in the Jim Crow south.[7] Italians could claim citizenship and voting rights, but they were referred to as “white niggers” because they did not “act white.”[8] For example, they took jobs as sharecroppers and tenant farmers. These jobs were primarily assigned to “blacks” and other “nonwhites,” and Italians not only worked alongside black and brown people, they married them. Further, Italians were frequently lynched for violating laws regarding marriage between whites and nonwhites.

As the twentieth-century progressed, Italians, like most other European immigrants, became preoccupied with eliminating their middle-ground status by seeking inclusion into the white race. Inclusion would exclude them from being considered “nonwhite” or “black,” and would save them and their children from the same social and political mistreatment as those who were deemed, nonwhite. Therefore, European immigrants began to invest in “whiteness.” Many converted from Roman Catholicism to Protestant Christianity. They changed their last names sound less ethnic, and they began committing acts of racism against blacks and nonwhites.[9]

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[7] See Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 57.
[8] Ibid., 57. See also, David Roediger, *Working Towards Whiteness: How America’s Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).
[9]I want to say more here about what I mean by an investment in whiteness. I understand that immigrants converted to Protestant Christianity and Anglicized their names to gain access to resources and support in the communities that they inhabited. We see this for example in Marian L. Smith’s essay, “American Names: Declaring Independence,” and in missionary histories by Derek Chang (2010) and David Evans (2011). However, histories also show that as European immigrants became more incorporated into white identity, they were given privileges in housing, education, and employment options that were limited or denied to blacks. Rather than pointing out

While Jacobson goes on to demonstrate legal cases that defined who could be white, and therefore who could be considered as an acceptable U.S. citizen, James Baldwin, raised by a black Pentecostal minister father, gets to the heart of the matter in a more intimate and mundane way.

In an essay titled, "On Being White…and Other Lies," Baldwin explains that European immigrants made themselves white in the confines of their own minds, by accepting the American racial status quo, and teaching their children to maintain that status quo. Baldwin explains, "America became white—the people who, as they claim "settled" the country became white—because of the necessity of denying the black presence, and justifying black subjugation."[10] Moreover, in turn, Baldwin explains that European immigrants internalized American ideology by decision. He writes:

> But this cowardice, this necessity of justifying a totally false identity and of justifying what must be called a genocidal history, has placed everyone now living into the hands of the most ignorant and powerful people the world has ever seen. And how did they get that way? By deciding that they were white. By opting for safety instead of life. By persuading themselves that a black child's life meant nothing compared to a white child's life. By abandoning their children to the things white men could buy. By informing their children that black women, black men, and black children had no human integrity that those who call themselves white were bound to respect. And in this debasement and definition of black people, they debased and defined themselves. And have brought humanity to the edge of oblivion...[11]

Baldwin's quote is useful for three reasons. One, Baldwin helps me to clarify my point about "American lawmakers" and "their enforcers." Here, I am not simply talking about "law enforcement." I am also referring to everyday, common people who were parents, business

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specific examples here, I am arguing that their assumption of white privilege alone makes them culpable as racist against blacks.

[10] James Baldwin, "On Being White…and Other Lies" in James Baldwin, *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings*, Edited and With an Introduction by Randall Kenan. (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010), 136.

[11] Ibid., 137.

owners, Christian pastors, missionaries, teachers, and so on, who buy into whiteness, and with whatever degree of power they have in a particular space, use that power daily to perpetuate and accommodate racism towards those who are nonwhite. Further, Baldwin will be useful as I delineate the work of Pannell and Skinner with respect to the development of a "pro-black" approach to evangelism below. Finally, going back to the William Pannell quote above, Baldwin points out how racist ideologies are taught from parent to child, and in turn, color the whole scene of community life: everyday lived experiences.

Pannell's 1968 work *My Friend, The Enemy*, demonstrates the inverse of Baldwin's quote. Black people—who have historically been unable to secure complete inclusion into whiteness— have also taught their children to accept the racial status quo in the U.S. However, the outcomes of those lessons on race were, and still are, drastically different from each other. Pannell experienced those differences long before he discovered his birth certificate. He was born on June 24, 1929 in Sturgis, Michigan, a town that maintained segregated residential areas, but operated integrated, public schools. Perhaps, Pannell expected his birth certificate to list his race as, "somewhat white." After all, Pannell believed that he had been taught to "think white." His early education in Sturgis did not include in its curriculum the contributions of black people to American history, literature, mathematics, and other general subjects. Pannell would not learn about the history of blacks in the U.S. until he was an adult and the civil rights movement was underway.

Further, Pannell explains in his interviews with Schuster and in his book, that the educational system maintained strict policies about which classes were appropriate for students to take based upon whether they were white or black. Pannell could not recall which specific classes he was assigned, but he sure that the bulk of his education was intended to train him to

become a skilled laborer.[12] Finally, while Pannell was recognized by local white men for his prowess in high school sports, he knew that he could not date their sisters or daughters. He could find work afterschool in their country club, but he was not permitted to play golf on the course.

Perhaps Pannell thought because of his "mixture of Spanish, Negro, and Indian bloods" that he should have been labeled, "mulatto." He does not mention much about his family histories and genealogies. Therefore, it is unclear how he came to learn of his "mixed" background. Pannell was mostly estranged from his father, William Pannell, Sr. His mother, Olive Pannell Perkins, died when he was a teenager. However, his observations about his stepfather, Joseph Perkins, provide more insights into how race and racism shaped Pannell's day-to-day life as a child and adolescent.

Joseph Perkins was a southern migrant from Kentucky to the Midwest. He found janitorial work at the military academy in Howe, Indiana, but he was not permitted to live in the city. Therefore, he like, other black workers, mostly men, employed by the academy took up residency in the black section of Sturgis. Many of these employees stayed in Pannell's childhood home with Perkins, his mother, and his siblings, because hotels and boarding houses were not available to black men. Pannell also recalled that he and his stepfather either had to wait for a barber who could come to their home, or travel nearly an hour west to Elkhart or South Bend, Indiana for haircuts. Pannell explains that his family never discussed why they did not simply use a barbershop near their home. Instead, they taught him to acquiesce to racism by modeling

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[12] Pannell's experience here is nearly identical to the experience Malcolm X recounted in his Autobiography written in collaboration with Alex Haley. Malcolm grew up in nearby Lansing, Michigan around the same time as Pannell was in Sturgis. Malcolm explains that, though he was the brightest student in his 8th grade class, he was encouraged to become a carpenter because it was not realistic for him to be a lawyer. See pages 42-44.

for him how to order his life to fit, not challenge, the circumscribed parameters of Jim Crow in the Midwest and throughout the country.

I hypothesize that Pannell's shock at the discovery of his race on his birth certificate had more to do with shifts in the public language about blackness than his rumination on the actual colors, black or white. The more popular term, "Negro," a term that Pannell himself used to describe himself, was being replaced with, "black" during the time Pannell was writing *My Friend, The Enemy*. "Black" as a descriptor for peoples of African and enslaved descent in the U.S, like the phrase, "New Negro" before it, was being used to denote pride, human dignity, and an unequivocal, active rejection of white supremacy.[13] In other words, black people were fighting back against racism in ways that were completely unfamiliar to Pannell. His observations of the southern civil rights campaigns, the uprisings in Watts and Detroit, and the increasing "white flight" of evangelical churches to the suburbs, forced Pannell to think about his status as a black man and his embrace of evangelical religion. His thoughts about his racial and religious identities are reflected throughout *My Friend, The Enemy*, which is part-memoir and part-thesis.

Pannell's first book is not well-known outside of evangelical circles. While not as eloquent and penetrating as Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* or Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, *My Friend, The Enemy* is a useful piece of twentieth-century literature that also sheds light on the systemic nature and nuances of white supremacy. Like the two-preceding works, *My Friend, The Enemy* is a slim volume. It contains eight brief essays that considers the roles of history,

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[13] The philosopher, Alaine Locke, coined the term, "New Negro" in 1925 in an edited volume of the same name. The term reflected the emergence of an educated class of black people, one to two generations removed from slavery who sought to develop a collective identity that would not bow to the system of Jim Crow. They were asserting themselves as intellectuals, activists, and artists who had a vision for themselves as productive American citizens.

religion, economics, and gender and sexuality in shaping ideas about race in the U.S. and among evangelical Christians. Throughout the book, Pannell raises the same questions and draws the same conclusions about race that began with Du Bois and continues to shape the work of Jesmyn Ward and Ta-Nehisi Coates today.[14] Pannell, like Du Bois, attempts to answer, "How does it feel to be a problem?"[15] Like Baldwin, Pannell came to realize that he, in fact, was not the problem in U.S. society. For Pannell and Baldwin, whites were the actual menaces to society. Their works demonstrate that racism and race was a white problem because whites created racism and race. The distinguishing factor between Pannell and Baldwin and DuBois, of course, is that he was specifically confronting that problem for white evangelicals, many of whom where his ministerial associations, colleagues, and friends.

Interestingly, it was Pannell's white friends and associates from the evangelical circles he moved within who encouraged him to publish a book on race and evangelism. He was deeply entrenched in what Randall Balmer, James K. Wellman and others have called, the "evangelical subculture." In other words, Pannell was connected to those parachurch organizations that emphasized world evangelism through youth ministry and missions. Further, as Wellman explains, these organizations operated outside of traditional denominational life and utilized "pop culture" to spread their Gospel message.[16]

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[14] See Ward's edited volume, *The Fire This Time: A New Generation Speaks About Race* (New York: Scribner, 2016) and *Between the World and Me* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015). Also, Coates's blogs on *The Atlantic* website frequently unpacks the experience of blackness in the U.S.

[15] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Introduction and Notes by Farah Jasmine Griffin (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2003), 7.

[16] See James K. Wellman's chapter, "The Origins of the American Subculture" in his book, Evangelical vs. Liberal: The Class of Christian Culture in the Pacific Northwest (Oxford Scholarship Online, September 2008). The chapter is available at: http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195300116.001.0001/acprof-9780195300116-chapter-2. Wellman also lists organizations such as Youth for Christ and Fuller Theological Seminary, the school Pannell has been affiliated with for over 40 years, as examples of the institutions that make up evangelical subculture. See also Randall Balmer (2014). That text, as it subtitle states, takes a "journey through the evangelical subculture in America." Balmer considers how evangelicals express their faith through bumper

By the mid-1960s, Pannell was working as one of the first black evangelists with YFC, the campus ministry that catapulted Billy Graham to national fame. A 1951 graduate of Fort Wayne Bible College (now known as Taylor University), Pannell worked as an evangelist and worship leader for the Brethren Assemblies church in Detroit before joining YFC in the same capacities. He created a niche for himself among YFC evangelists by pushing the organization to move more towards social action and urban evangelism. Besides his roles as preacher and evangelist, Pannell also used his pen as a method to push his message.[17] Several articles appeared in Christian magazines, including, *The Other Side*, which was founded by Fred and John Alexander.[18] Pannell also wrote the screenplay, "The Real Race Issue" for a short film directed by Ken Anderson for YFC.[19] This film caught the attention of the publishers of Word Press who reached out to Pannell through Anderson. Pannell asked the publisher, "Do you want a book, or do you want an honest book?"[20]

Considering William Pannell's connection to evangelical publications and filmmakers, it is reasonable to assume that the primary audiences for the book he wrote for Word Press would

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stickers and movies, and considers educational institutions that provide the intellectual and theological framework for evangelicals.

[17] I want to define here what I mean by these two terms, "evangelist" and "preacher." I understand an evangelist to be a preacher, one who delivers sermons and guides people to religion, but the difference, of course, is that evangelists usually have a public, traveling ministry.

[18] I briefly mention John Alexander in Note 2. He and his father, Fred, founded and published both *The Other Side* and *Freedom Now* in Cleveland, Ohio. They shared with Pannell and Skinner a desire to push white evangelicals to support the civil rights movement to demonstrate true Christian love and fellowship. Their stories are not only covered in the Swartz texts mentioned in Note 2, but also in Brantley Gasaway's *Progressive Evangelicals and the Pursuit of Social Justice* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014). This book also "whitewashes" the history of progressive evangelicals.

[19] Ken Anderson (1917-2006) was a noted Christian filmmaker. His most successful film was *Pilgrim's Progress* starting Liam Neeson in 1979. Anderson produced most of the short films for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, including the one mentioned in the Introduction that featured black students documenting their concerns with the Urbana Conference in 1967.

[20] Robert Schuster, "Tape 5," February 28, 2000, in *Interviews of William E. Pannell-Collection 498 at Billy Graham Center Archives at Wheaton College*, MP3 audio, 33:11, https://ensemble.wheaton.edu/hapi/v1/contents/permalinks/Dz2e8FCa/view.

have been written specifically for white evangelical consumers. Pannell's "honesty" about his experiences with racism as a black man in the U.S. who worked in evangelical ministry is so critical of white Christians that his white associates did not believe that he authored the work. One unnamed friend believed that "an outside agitator wrote it," because the book was, "just not the Bill Pannell I knew."[21] Pannell responded to this friend, "That's because you didn't know Bill Pannell, or the world I lived in."[22] Pannell's book demonstrates that his world was complex. By 1968, he had witnessed many of the noted tragedies and triumphs of the civil rights movement. The black power movement and riots in urban areas were developing across the country. Pannell's own adopted city of Detroit had erupted in violence after black protestors there fought back against a corrupt police force. In addition, within days of the release of his monograph, Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated. William Pannell was no activist. However, the racial climate of the 1960s, forced him to grapple with his identity as a black man and as evangelical, and to resolve that conflict, he, along with his close associate, Tom Skinner, became more radicalized evangelicals.

In his "Introduction," Pannell writes of wanting to be "properly related" to his people (blacks and others), and to Christianity. However, he had found that over the years he had spent in ministry to that point, that white Christians never intended to become appropriately connected to him. He writes:

> I personally know churches in all kinds of denominations whose flight to suburbia testifies eloquently to their rejection of me as a brother and a neighbor. But then perhaps I am making too much of this. After all, isn't our "citizenship in heaven"? Yes, but that gives little balm when viewing the bloodied form of a twelve-year-old lying face down on Newark's cold pavement. Scriptural quotations about the end time and the spirit of the

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[21] "This is Then, That Was Now." *Fuller Studio Online*. Undated. https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/this-is-then-that-was-now/.

[22] Ibid., "This is Then, That Was Now." *Fuller Studio Online*. Undated. https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/this-is-then-that-was-now/.

> age fail to soothe a breaking spirit when one views children looting a neighborhood store for a paltry bag of potato chips. But what would my white brother know of this? He taught me to sing, “Take the World but Give Me Jesus.” I took Jesus. He took the world and then voted right wing to ensure his property rights. A riot can make you feel more lonely than suburbia will ever know.[23]

What we see here in this quote is Pannell directly presenting his identity crisis with respect to race and his faith as one that exists because of the duplicitous nature of evangelical Christianity in the U.S. Here, and throughout the remainder of the text, Pannell associates white evangelical Christians’ approach to biblical interpretation, evangelizing, and politics with the maintenance of white supremacy. This quote does not demonstrate this, but Pannell, on several occasions, throughout the book, openly calls white Christians racist. At the same time, it is clear from his writings and interviews, that Pannell believed that many of his evangelical friends had good intentions towards him as an individual person. Still, he presents multiple examples throughout his text of their willful and deliberate ignorance and utter hypocrisy when it came to systematic racism in the U.S. Further, he connects those examples to their personal racist, oppressive behaviors. Moreover, in doing so, Pannell presents his own black evangelical experience as one of naïve, yet increasingly bitter accommodation of white supremacy that was transforming into “righteous discontent” as the 1960s progressed.[24]

In the first essay, “Sing One of Your Songs,” Pannell compares white Christians to the Babylonians in Psalm 137. He recalls an incident at a segregated bible camp in Kentucky. To be clear, there was not a white camp and a black camp operating simultaneously. The black camp

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[23] William Pannell, *My Friend, The Enemy* (Waco: Word Books), 6-7. Pannell is referencing here to the cover of *Life Magazine*. The July 28, 1967 featured a photograph of the body of twelve-year-old, Joe Bass, Jr., who was struck by a police officer’s bullet during the riot.

[24] I am referencing Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham’s book, Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in The Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920. This 1994 book published by Harvard University Press details the efforts of black women to transform the Baptist church into an activist organization. The efforts of women such as, Nannie Helen Burroughs (1879-1961), to create a space for themselves in their denomination remind me of Skinner and Pannell’s impact on evangelicalism.

could only be held after the white staff and campers left the grounds. One day, during the lunch hour, the white owners of the camp interrupted the meal and requested that Pannell, his staff, and their children sing the Negro National Anthem. Pannell explained this "unthinking request" as one of many ways that evangelicals "innocently" reminded black Christians of their place. Pannell and his campers were not only considered second-class citizens, they were also second-class Christians. Pannell, unlike the rest of his group, did not sing the song. It was not out of defiance of the request. However, out of ignorance. He did not know that the anthem existed.

Recall, Pannell's childhood was shaped by a stepfather who taught him how to simply survive in a racist world, and by a school system that taught him manual labor and nothing about the contributions of black people to American history. Yet, because of his visibility as a black man in white Christian spaces, Pannell was expected to inherently possess knowledge about black history. Further, it was assumed that he could readily perform the culture productions from that history for those who not only ignored the contributions of blacks to American society, but also benefited from his ignorance. Faced with his own historical illiteracy, Pannell's second essay, "In Search of a Past," charts American history from slavery to segregation.

Here, Pannell is concerned with the lingering effects of slavery on the American psyche as expressed through the organizing of American cities—specifically the creation of ghettoes—and through language. Pannell convincingly demonstrates how the language of "white civilization" from slavery to the 1960s became thoroughly internalized by white evangelicals. And, because of misleading definitions of "freedom," and connotations of the words, "white" and "black," Pannell was convinced that white evangelicals did not understand how their approach towards blacks were one, racist, and two, preemptive of authentic Christian community within their ministries.

Pannell uses an article from the actor and playwright, Ossie Davis, to make his case. The essay, "The English Language is My Enemy," argues that the English language is "infected by racism."[25] To prove his point, Davis explains, "A superficial examination of Roget's Thesaurus of the English language reveals the following facts: the word whiteness has 134 synonyms: 44 of which are favorable and pleasing to contemplate…The word blackness has 120 synonyms; 60 of which are distinctly unfavorable, and none of them even mildly positive."[26] The reader is able to juxtapose words such as, "purity" and "cleanliness" with "evil" and "dirty." Further, in 1967, the Roget's Thesaurus had 20 synonyms for "black" that were related to racial descriptors and epithets including, "Negro, Negress, nigger, darky, and blackamoor."[27] Taking his cue from Davis, Pannell then teases out how the language of blackness, specifically of black inferiority, shaped the communication and organizing of white evangelicals in the remainder of his second chapter, and in the subsequent essays that round out *My Friend, The Enemy*.

First, he considers how the language of blackness shaped ideologies about sin and salvation in churches and seminaries. While he points to examples in scripture that describe sin as "scarlet" or "crimson," Pannell explains that white preachers often cast sin as "black."[28] He uses an example a film showed at a YFC event on "Youth in America" that depicted all "non-white" teenagers as violent, impoverished, and illiterate. As a student at the fundamentalist, Fort Wayne Bible College, Pannell was taught that Africans, more than any other people on the planet, were more in need of salvation than any other foreign group. The continent of Africa was the destination of all their missionary efforts. Furthermore, Pannell, as a black student, was not

[25] Ossie Davis, "The English Language is My Enemy," *Negro History Bulletin* (April 1967): 18.
[26] Ibid., 18.
[27] Ibid., 18.
[28] An example would be Isaiah 1:18 which states in the NRSV, "Come now, let us argue it out, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool."

permitted to go on these mission trips because the governing board would not accept him on the grounds of race. The school's message was clear: black people needed to be saved. White people were saviors, like Jesus Christ, whom Pannell suggests was fashioned into a "Caucasian, middle-class, suburbanite," in the Christological imaginations of his teachers and colleagues.[29]

Second, Pannell further attacks white "fundamentalist" Christian leaders for how they used the language of black inferiority to push an anti-civil rights agenda.[30] While Pannell's seminary campus was integrated, there were strict policies about socializing that encouraged the "separation of the races" with respect to dating. In short, Pannell explains briefly in his third chapter and at length in the seventh, that the civil rights movement was viewed by fundamentalists and evangelicals as an attempt on the part of blacks to marry white people. He argues that this perspective was shortsighted because it not only served to reinforce racist misconceptions about black male sexuality, it was also hypocritical. Pannell suggests that it was a well-known fact, especially in the South, that, "integration always did work after dark."[31] Pannell does not elaborate much further. However, considering the scholarship on sexual violence, slavery, and segregation, it is easy to fill in the blanks that Pannell leaves there. For example, scholars have documented how white men saw civil rights activism as an infringement upon their political rights *and* their sexual sovereignty.[32]

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[29] Pannell, *My Friend, The Enemy*, 39.

[30] Pannell describes "fundamentalists" as Christians who were "anti-modernist, anti-RSV, anti-World or National Council and anti-Roman Catholic" on page 50 of *My Friend, The Enemy*. Though George Marsden (1980) and James Wellman (2008) have offered definitions of the term, Pannell is using fundamentalists here to describe those Christians who believed in the "segregation of the races" based on their understandings of the story of Ham in Genesis.

[31] Pannell, *My Friend, The Enemy*, 41.

[32] See Danielle McGuire, for example (2010). While McGuire's work primarily addresses sexual violence against black women, she shows how white men maintained sexual power over black women and men during the Jim Crow era.

Pannell's comments on black male sexuality show that he is clearly presenting whites' fears about "intermarriage" as having more to do with a challenge to the sexual freedoms of white men than about the actual relationship goals of black people trying to integrate lunch counters.[33] White men, under slavery and Jim Crow, could rape and lynch black bodies with impunity. In states with anti-miscegenation laws, white men could openly maintain sexual relationships with black women, though they could not marry their mistresses.[34] White men could treat black bodies as things. Pannell understood this, and several times throughout the third and seventh chapters, he stresses that black people are human beings. They were created by God to be social, relational, and capable of having "enlightened conversations in broad daylight" that were not intended to lead to sex or marriage.[35] However, he also understood that his white Christian brethren did not fully regard blacks as whole citizens, whole Christians, or whole humans. Pannell takes them to task for this by pointing out the proliferation of color-blind racism and tokenism in evangelical organizations by again examining language.

Though many within the evangelical establishment insisted that the preaching of the Gospel was incompatible with civil rights activism, they gradually permitted black Christians to attend their seminaries and to join parachurch ministries. Clearly, as Pannell points out, their acceptance of black people was not due to their changing thoughts and language about the equal status of "Negroes." Rather, these institutions began to include black people for the appearance of social relevancy. The mere presence of black folk in their number made white evangelicals

[33] Again, McGuire's work is useful as she not only talks about rape in the context of white men and black women. She also considers how white women maintained sexual power over black men by threatening to accuse him of rape if he spurred her advances.
[34] Peggy Pascoe's 2010 book, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press), offers another view in conversation with McGuire on the sexual authority white men maintained under segregation.
[35] Pannell, 52.

believe that they could absolve themselves of their racism. Yet, Pannell did not pardon them. He writes:

> This explains the sticky position of black men who belong to denominations whose constituency is largely white. I get the impression that they are spectacled birds, lonely and unacknowledged except in some token way so as to ease the parent conscious. Ultimately, of course, they will be called upon to bail the mission department out of hot water when the white missionary is *persona non grata*. "Where are your Negro young people in this hour of their greatest opportunity?" they will say. "We could use them today all over the world." The very language is oppressive. Our brothers have been using us for years.[36]

Pannell further reiterates how he personally felt "used" by white evangelicals in conversation with Robert Schuster in 2000. Pannell, and his close associate Tom Skinner, were often invited to meetings and conferences such as the 1969 World Conference on Evangelism in Minneapolis, but they were clear that they were only there because organizers needed a "black presence."[37] However, they did not want black voices, black stories, and black language to present and to speak at those proceedings. Pannell explains, "We were considered to be arrogant, if we questioned the decisions of those men."[38] Therefore, he and Skinner reasoned that they were simply going to "rent themselves out" to the schools and organizations that invited them to events.[39] In other words, they showed up, observed, received some degree of compensation, and then they, along with their white associates went back to their status quo. These meetings, however, gave both Pannell and Skinner a chance to make two new types of friends. One, they

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[36] Pannell, 54.

[37] Robert Schuster, "Tape 5," February 28, 2000, in *Interviews of William E. Pannell-Collection 498 at Billy Graham Center Archives at Wheaton College*, MP3 audio, 33:11, https://ensemble.wheaton.edu/hapi/v1/contents/permalinks/Dz2e8FCa/view.

[38] Robert Schuster, "Tape 6," August 18, 2003, in *Interviews of William E. Pannell-Collection 498 at Billy Graham Center Archives at Wheaton College*, MP3 audio, 1:32:46, https://ensemble.wheaton.edu/hapi/v1/contents/permalinks/Jn5o8PFp/view.

[39] Robert Schuster, "Tape 5," February 28, 2000, in *Interviews of William E. Pannell-Collection 498 at Billy Graham Center Archives at Wheaton College*, MP3 audio, 33:11, https://ensemble.wheaton.edu/hapi/v1/contents/permalinks/Dz2e8FCa/view.

developed more relationships with the white leaders of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship and Campus Crusade for Christ to organize evangelism events together. Two, they began connecting with young, black college students who were members of those organizations.

Pannell explains that the more intimate he became with white evangelicals, the more they began to attempt to differentiate between him and other blacks. Particularly, those blacks who were associated with protest movements. Again, Pannell was no activist, but his presence in white churches and parachurch associations presented him with opportunities to talk about race and activism. He frequently heard statements like, "But I don't see you as a black man. To me you're just another guy. We never think of you as a Negro."[40] Pannell completely understood that these statements were said in sincerity in most cases. Some of his evangelical brethren did want a "personal friendship" with him.[41] However, Pannell heard something else in these words. He explains:

> I also consider it as an unrecognized form of prejudice in many. For subtly and surreptitiously is hidden in that phrase some shame and embarrassment about my color. The person addressing me has never come to terms about color and so chooses to it ignore it. It can't be done, and now the Negro in America is most concerned that the white man *see* him.[42]

Pannell did not have the language of "color-blind racism" in 1968 to define the "unrecognized form of prejudice" he was accusing whites of perpetuating. Color-blind racism was first introduced into academic circles through the work of Eduardo Bonilla-Silva in the early 2000s.[43] However, conversations about "colorblindness" have become mundane in national conversations

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[40] Pannell, *My Friend, The Enemy*, 43.
[41] Ibid., 43.
[42] Ibid., 43.
[43] See, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and The Persistence of Racial Inequality in America* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

on race and racism since the election of President Barack Obama in 2008.[44] Journalists, bloggers, scholars, and activists are constantly talking about the concept in attempt to inform whites (and others) that they are essentially being racists when they claim to "see people and not color."[45]

Dani Bostick, a teacher, counselor, and blogger for the HuffPost, clearly and succinctly describes colorblindness. Bostick explains that while the statement "is a common response from white people attempting to reject racism," it is "actually racist" in five distinct ways. She writes: "Colorblindness: foists whiteness on everyone, strips non-white people of their uniqueness, suppresses critically important narratives of oppression, assumes everyone has the same experience here in America, and promotes the idea that non-white races are inferior."[46] Bostick's definition is helpful in expanding upon Pannell's thinking about what it meant for him to have his color ignored at a moment in history when blacks were gaining small victories in the dismantling of segregation. The description is also useful for making sense of Pannell's evangelizing mission after the publication of *My Friend, The Enemy*.

Pannell and Skinner began to bond with the black students who were members of evangelical campus associations. Many of these students were involved with civil rights activism, and they were beginning to talk about "black power." Pannell and Skinner saw in this language an opportunity to counter the narrative of race as they had personally experienced it in evangelical ministries. They, too, began talking about "black pride," "power," and "liberation" as they believed it related to the Gospel. By late 1968, Pannell and Skinner began using this

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[44] Bonilla updated his book after the election of Barack Obama to discuss the matter of "post-racialism" in the U.S., and the fifth edition of the work was published in the summer of 2017.
[45] Dani Bostick, "How Color-Blindness is Actually Racist." *The Huffington Post* July 11, 2016. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dani-bostick/how-colorblindness-is-act_b_10886176.html.
[46] Ibid., Dani Bostick, "How Color-Blindness is Actually Racist." *The Huffington Post* July 11, 2016. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dani-bostick/how-colorblindness-is-act_b_10886176.html.

language to carve out a new identity for themselves as evangelicals, and to create a new approach to evangelism. They did this by intentionally making their black identity clearly visible in their evangelistic efforts. Specifically, they created the TSA with the purpose of reaching black communities with an all-black evangelistic team.

By the end of *My Friend, The Enemy*, one gets the sense that the conclusion of the book occurred in the middle. The fourth chapter, "My Friend, The Enemy or Games Conservatives Play," Pannell launches a full-on attack on white evangelicals for failing to properly respond to the civil rights movement. Specifically, he takes issues with those whites who argue that activists are perpetuating "the race problem" in America. In Baldwinian fashion, Pannell strikes, "To him, the cause of brotherhood, the disintegration of human relations—civil rights!—is my problem. Mine, because presumably I created it and I perpetuate it. Well, friend-it is my cause, of course, and have my part to play, but it is *your* problem simply because you created it and you perpetuate it."[47] The problem that Pannell is talking about is "white power." Pannell argues that white power not only created race, white power was also responsible for creating the racist conditions that caused riots in the cities. He offers multiple examples of how white power kept black people confined to substandard housing, employment, and education. He then moves on to talk about "black power" and the need for black people to develop power for themselves. Essentially, the concept of "power," "identity," and "community" became three pillars around which the Tom Skinner Associates was organized and executed.

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[47] Pannell, *My Friend, The Enemy*, 62.

Christianity Today called *My Friend, The Enemy*, a "stinging and slashing attack on white complacency, hypocrisy, paternalism, and smugness."[48] However, one can learn more about the implications of Pannell's work by a briefly considering the opportunities— afforded and denied to him—after the book's publication. The most disappointing outcome that Pannell experienced was a severance in his relationship with Fort Wayne Bible College. In the seventeen years since his graduation, Pannell had been cast as one of the institution's "favorite sons."[49] However, the administration swiftly rescinded their support of him as YFC evangelist following the publication of *My Friend, The Enemy*. According to Pannell's interview with Robert Schuster, the school stopped inviting him to participate in community events aimed at strengthening the school's relationship with black churches in Fort Wayne and surrounding cities.

The book also put strain on his relationships with fellow YFC evangelists. Many white evangelists were beginning to believe that Pannell was increasingly becoming "too political," and they resented his constant criticisms.[50] Pannell was equally aggravated by their unwillingness to organize evangelism programs in black communities. He understood that YFC was funded by white middle-class men and women who expected the organization to cater to the interests of their children. Therefore, when Tom Skinner reached out to Pannell months after *My*

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[48] The book was reviewed by Dr. Dirk Jillema, Professor of History at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. His essay for *Christianity Today* was titled, "Evangelicals' Racial Paralysis." It was published on August 30, 1968, Volume 12, No 23.

[49] Robert Schuster, "Tape 5," February 28, 2000, in *Interviews of William E. Pannell-Collection 498 at Billy Graham Center Archives at Wheaton College*, MP3 audio, 33:11, https://ensemble.wheaton.edu/hapi/v1/contents/permalinks/Dz2e8FCa/view.

[50] In Pannell's second book, *The Coming Race Wars: A Cry for Reconciliation*, his friend, Jay Kesler, who went to seminary with him and worked with him in Youth for Christ, lamented that Pannell was yet again reminding whites of the problem of race. Kesler wrote a forward to the book. Though he admitted to being "weary" of hearing Pannell again on the matter of race, he acknowledges that the conversation remains necessary. The book was published in 1993 in response to the Los Angeles Riot of 1992 that occurred in response to the brutal beating of Rodney King by LAPD.

Friend, The Enemy was published, Pannell decided to join Skinner's Harlem Evangelistic Association (HEA). Ultimately, the book earned Pannell a new ministry partner and a new job.

In 1968, Tom Skinner was a 26-year-old evangelist who had been conducting the Tom Skinner Crusades under the auspices of the HEA since 1962. Skinner was the organization's only evangelist. His wife, Vivian, was its only full-time staff member. He met Pannell through their mutual connections in the predominately white Plymouth Brethren Assemblies movement and YFC, and Skinner needed someone with Pannell's organizational experience to develop the HEA. Pannell, who was thirteen years older than Skinner was, admired the younger man's fiery preaching ability. They were certain that with their unique experiences as black men who were closely associated with predominately-white ministries, they could develop the HEA to create a safe space for black students they met in these ministries, and to effect change in black communities throughout the country.

To answer the first question, regarding biographical information on Pannell and Skinner, it is clear from his writing and interviews that William Pannell was a black evangelist and author who used his pen to bear witness to the role white supremacy played in evangelical culture. Specifically, he used his pen to condemn white people on page for their racism. This was incredibly bold on the part of Pannell considering that white people were more than likely the primary consumers of the articles and the book he wrote for evangelical magazines and publishers. William Pannell also took practical action to counteract racism and paternalism by accepting Skinner's offer to collaborate as evangelists. Pannell's decision to join the TSA shifted the racial composition of the audience he directed his work to. Though his writings were primarily addressed to white evangelicals, his work with the TSA gave him an opportunity to work more closely with black communities. Pannell served as the TSA's worship leader, chief

strategist for revivals, and as an intellectual and theological mentor to Tom Skinner. Tom Skinner, who was developing a reputation as, "the black Billy Graham," remained as the primary preacher and representative of the organization.[51] In 1970, Skinner and Pannell rebranded the organization as the Tom Skinner Associates, to reflect a more collaborative approach to ministry and to differentiate themselves from "crusade" history.[52] The organization specialized in developing evangelistic events in urban areas, developing campus ministry programs for black students, after-school programs, and a variety of other social services programming for neighborhoods throughout New York and New Jersey.

"The Liberator Has Come": Tom Skinner's Pro-Black and Pro-Evangelical Identity

Tom Skinner also had a monograph published in 1968. His memoir, *Black and Free*, had distinct similarities and differences with Pannell's work. Skinner's approach to race was two-pronged. Like, Pannell, he also attempted to convince white Christians of the role that white supremacy played in urban riots. Skinner, a native of Harlem, explained how corrupt police officers and city officials conspired with slumlords and storeowners to ensure that blacks in Harlem remained in poverty, addicted to drugs and alcohol, and imprisoned. Skinner also noted several examples where he experienced blatant racism in evangelical ministries, although he was not as detailed about those experiences as Pannell. Finally, he criticized white evangelical conservatives for prescribing salvation to black folk in Harlem, but they never went to the

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[51] There are several news clips in Skinner's papers that bill him as "the black Billy Graham," but Skinner never embraced the title. Though, he and the TSA worked with Graham on several occasions, Skinner wanted to be clear that he was not like, E.V. Hill, a preacher who acquiesced to the evangelical right's stance on civil rights and black power.

[52] Pannell explained to Schuster that they dropped "crusade" from their title because they did not like the history of the crusades, and they wanted to further distinguish themselves from a connection to Graham. See Robert Schuster, "Tape 6," August 18, 2003, in *Interviews of William E. Pannell-Collection 498 at Billy Graham Center Archives at Wheaton College*, MP3 audio, 1:32:46, https://ensemble.wheaton.edu/hapi/v1/contents/permalinks/Jn5o8PFp/view.

borough to actually preach and work among Harlemites. Skinner charged, “To the shame of the so-called white, evangelical, conservative Christian in the United States, he does not support financially, morally, spiritually, or in any other way, works that are attempting to communicate the message of Jesus Christ to the Negro in America.”[53] Skinner not only condemned white evangelical Christians for not responding to black communities, he placed the responsibility upon himself for communicating the Gospel to black people through the creation of the TSA, which I examine below.

Another major difference is that where Pannell was primarily speaking on behalf of black evangelicals to whites, Skinner had a unique message for blacks. The son of a Baptist preacher, Skinner claims he became disillusioned with black church life at an early age. He argued that black churches were driven by emotional, charismatic preaching. Further, he charged that there was no real spiritual transformation in the preacher and his people. Skinner cites examples of pastors in adulterous affairs, and congregants who were still addicted to drugs. By his own account, Skinner was a model child and student by day, who attended church with his family every Sunday. However, at night, he was the “undisputed leader” of the Harlem Lords. The street gang gave him a sense of power and identity in a neighborhood fueled by political and spiritual corruption.

Tom Skinner claimed that his life changed after hearing a radio evangelist preach about repentance as he prepared to lead his gang in a fight. The unnamed radio preacher convinced Tom that evangelical religion was the only powerful source that could make him a “new creature in Christ.” He did not need his identity as a Harlem Lord to help him escape a life of poverty and

[53] Tom Skinner, *Black and Free* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1968), 31.

prejudice. Therefore, instead of leading his gang in a fight on that fateful night, Tom met them at the designated and announced that he was leaving the group. Soon after he began preaching the Gospel, which he came to believe was the only real antidote for blacks in Harlem.

There are parts of *Black and Free* that read like a novel. Where Pannell took a more academic approach to studying the nature of race in the U.S. and its effect on evangelicalism, Skinner's more personal testimony of a dramatic conversion was designed as a "tailor made" tool to promote his budding evangelistic ministry.[54] He would later transform his memoir into a comic book. Much like the memoir, the comic seems to overemphasize how brutal and tough Tom Skinner was as a "gang strategist."[55] Whether Skinner embellished his involvement in gang life is beyond the point, of course. His ultimate message to young, black men is clear: If Jesus could save a "wretch like me," Jesus can save anybody.[56]

Skinner also comes across as overly judgmental towards black religion in Harlem. For example, he shows little appreciation for congregations such as, Abyssinian Baptist Church, an

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[54] I do not believe that Pannell is suggesting in Tape 6 that Skinner's book was crafted fictitiously, but rather he was acknowledging that Skinner's story included the type of material that would attract young people to evangelicalism. See Robert Schuster, "Tape 6," August 18, 2003, in *Interviews of William E. Pannell-Collection 498 at Billy Graham Center Archives at Wheaton College*, MP3 audio, 1:32:46, https://ensemble.wheaton.edu/hapi/v1/contents/permalinks/Jn5o8PFp/view.

[55] Throughout *Black and Free,* Skinner makes references to his multiple gang battles and he seems to be praising himself for how skilled he was as a leader. Though in the note above, I said that I don't believe that Pannell thought that Skinner was lying about his involvement. But, Skinner's enthusiasm about his gang exploits seem fabricated to me. A Google Search on the Harlem Lords yielded two reports that haven't necessarily resolved my thoughts on the matter. The first, "50 Years of Westside Story: The Real Gangs of New York" by Paul Kendall for *The Telegraph* offer history of gangs in the 1950s that sound very similar to the events that Skinner describes. Among his sources, Kendall quotes bystanders who were entertained by gang fights that happened in playgrounds in New York boroughs. Skinner could have very well just been a bystander, and not an actual member of a gang. Kendall's article can be found at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/donotmigrate/3556888/50-years-of-West-Side-Story-the-real-Gangs-of-New-York.html. An unnamed blogger who runs the site, newyorkcitygangs.com, interviewed a man from the Harlem Lords who claims that Skinner paid them not to disclose that he was never a member after *Black and Free* was published in 1968. I realize that I have ventured into a rabbit hole, but in my conversation about Eldridge Cleaver, in Chapter 4, I explore the ways that black evangelicals sometimes used their "blackness" as a commodity to be consumed by white evangelicals who wanted to have black people around them.

[56] Skinner does not quote the lyrics to "Amazing Grace," but it is clear from this particular book that Skinner wants to portray himself as someone who was very vile and mean and needed to be saved, or converted to Christianity.

institution that worked diligently to provide social services and support to poor blacks and activist leadership in New York.[57] Further, Harlem was home to one of the largest branches of the Nation of Islam.[58] Of course, it would have been counterproductive for Skinner to praise a man like Malcolm X in a story about his conversion to "the white man's religion."[59] Yet, its problematic racial ideologies aside, the Nation of Islam was instrumental in teaching black history to black people in the U.S., and they, too, developed businesses and systems of support to enact social change for blacks in Harlem.[60] In fact, it is highly likely that Skinner was more influenced by the Nation of Islam than he admits in his memoir. He credits the black nationalists in his neighborhood for teaching him about history, and about the role of Christianity in perpetuating the systems of slavery and segregation.[61]

When Skinner became partners with Pannell, his language and approach to writing changed dramatically. Of course, Skinner, who emerged as the more prolific writer for the TSA, continued to write in a manner that promoted the evangelistic aims of the association. He still wrote to encourage conversion. However, Skinner's later books and his 1970 InterVarsity speech, "The Liberator Has Come," reflect a more intellectual approach to the study of race and

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[57] There is no definitive biography on Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., but he and his more famous son were instrumental in shaping Abyssinian Baptist Church into a space that provided a wide range of services for black people in Harlem. For additional information, see the book, *Witness: Two Hundred Years of African-American Faith and Practice of Abyssinian Baptist Church of Harlem, New York*, edited by Genna Rae McNeil, Bryan Houston, and Quinton Dixie (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014).
[58] This branch was led by Malcolm X.
[59] I still think that Malcolm X's *Autobiography* provides the best account of the Nation of Islam, considering that he began the book before his split with Elijah Muhammad. Before this split, Malcolm was convinced that Christianity was the chief tool of white people to enforce white supremacy.
[60] Herbert Berg's essay, "Mythmaking in the African Muslim Context: The Moorish Science Temple, The Nation of Islam, and the American Society of Muslims," offers one of the better examination of the racial ideologies of the NOI. It can be found in *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 73, No. 3. (2005).
[61] Skinner, *Black and Free*, 32-33.

religion that demonstrated Pannell's influence.[62] Further, Skinner employed more language from the black power movement. Skinner and Pannell saw in black power language, ideas about "liberation," "revolution," and "radicalism" that helped them to push against the perceived inferiority of blacks in evangelicalism. This language also gave them a new sense of being in community with whites, blacks, and other racial and cultural groups in the nation. In the few short years they spent together, Skinner and Pannell used their platform through the TSA to demand that their white brothers and friends see them as equals in ministry and as equals as citizens of the U.S.

The first evangelistic endeavor that Skinner and Pannell embarked upon together officially as the TSA was held in Newark, New Jersey in 1968. They had been invited to the city by the Newark Evangelistic Association, a predominately-white ministry that wanted to be more effective in reaching the city in the wake of the 1967 riot. The black residents of Newark, like those in Detroit (1967) and Watts (1965), resorted to rioting in direct response to an incident of police brutality. However, historians of urban riots have shown that black people were actually responding to mounting issues of police brutality, in addition to redlining, substandard housing, and unemployment.[63] Pannell and Skinner were not fully aware of all the politics of the association that invited them to Newark. In other words, they were not clear on why they were selected as the evangelists that the Newark Evangelistic Association approached to assist them in responding to the riots. Thirty years later, Pannell believed that they were invited there to be models of "black evangelical respectability" who could assist the association in reaching blacks,

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[62] It is important to note that Skinner was a graduate of Wagner College and he received a M.T.S. degree from Manhattan Theological Seminary. I am not suggesting that he was not educated, but I think that Pannell's style of writing eventually influenced Skinner's approach.

[63] For examples, see Kevin Mumford's study on Newark (2008) and Thomas Sugrue's on Detroit (2014).

who white evangelicals believed, "caused riots" with the Gospel.[64] However, he and Skinner found themselves more transformed by the black religious and community leaders who were outside of the evangelical fold in Newark. They found themselves having to think through the implications of an all-black evangelical association as calls for black power increased throughout the country.

Pannell recounts for Robert Schuster how he and Skinner met with the secretary of a local black Episcopal priest who was instrumental in organizing the nation's first black power conference in Newark exactly one week after the riots. The secretary supplied Pannell with a pamphlet that was produced by the conference. Pannell could not remember the priest's name, or the title of the tract.[65] However, he recalls that the overarching themes of "identity," "community," and "power" as expressed in the pamphlet had a profound effect on him and Skinner. As I turn to more of Skinner's writings, his acclaimed InterVarsity speech, the TSA's radio ministry, and the criticisms the TSA faced from the white evangelical community, I will show how those concepts influenced, empowered, and guided them throughout the black power era. Before moving to Skinner's work, I first need to identify and engage with the project of the chief organizer of the black power conference in Newark.

Robert Schuster's extensive transcription notes of his interviews with Pannell never included the additional information about the Episcopal priest that was mentioned on Tape 6. Given the amount of time that lapsed in between their interviews, it is possible that Pannell and

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[64] Robert Schuster, "Tape 6," August 18, 2003, in *Interviews of William E. Pannell-Collection 498 at Billy Graham Center Archives at Wheaton College*, MP3 audio, 1:32:46, https://ensemble.wheaton.edu/hapi/v1/contents/permalinks/Jn5o8PFp/view.

[65] Ibid., Robert Schuster, "Tape 6," August 18, 2003, in *Interviews of William E. Pannell-Collection 498 at Billy Graham Center Archives at Wheaton College*, MP3 audio, 1:32:46, https://ensemble.wheaton.edu/hapi/v1/contents/permalinks/Jn5o8PFp/view.

Schuster may have forgotten that they wanted to include more information about the black power conference in their conversations. The Episcopal priest that Pannell mentioned was Nathan Wright, Jr. By the time of his death in 2005, Wright would be known for his extensive work as an activist with several civil rights organizations including the Congress on Racial Equality, a prolific author, and as the founder of the department of African and Afro-American Studies at the State University of New York at Albany. He became a vocal black power advocate in the late sixties because he agreed with Stokely Carmichael and other SNCC leaders' approach to political and economic development in black communities. In other words, Wright supported the idea of black people organizing their own businesses and creating their own political bases to become power players in their communities. He further believed that no matter how sympathetic whites were to black causes, they could never fully identify with the unique oppression of blacks in the U.S., and therefore, he stressed the need for black people to unite across class, gender, and political lines.[66]

One year after Carmichael's speech in Greenwood, Mississippi, Wright convened the black power conference in association with a host of black activists from around the country and from several countries in Africa to discuss how to organize the concept of black power into both secular *and* religious institutions in black communities.[67] The group met in Newark between July 20 and July 23, 1967. The riots, which started on July 13, not only had a significant impact on the city, but also on the personal lives of the conference's organizers.[68] The melee clearly

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[66] Wright, who was a lifelong Republican, was considered a "moderate" in the black power movement. But, he attempted to use his "middle ground" approach to connect blacks through the conference and in his other organizing and written works. See his books, *Black Power and Urban Unrest* (1967) and *Ready to Riot* (1968).

[67] Notable conference leaders included Ron Karenga, creator of Kwanzaa, the actor, Ossie Davis, and H. Rap Brown, who assumed leadership of SNCC after Stokely Carmichael and worked to establish an alliance between that organization and the Black Panther Party in Oakland.

[68] According to reports, Newark experienced $10 million in physical damages, and 26 people were killed by the police, several of them were children. See, for example, Errin Haines Whack, "Newark riots recall an era echoed by

solidified their purpose for the convention: to address the condition of black lives in the cities. Their goals were also personal. They were meeting to discuss the fate of their own lives. Amiri Baraka, one of the more prominent leaders, arrived at the meetings bruised and bandaged, bearing a physical reminder of the police brutality, that "black power" was coined to confront.[69] One of the lasting legacies from that conference was a pamphlet titled, "The Black Power Manifesto and Resolutions."[70] This was the pamphlet that William Pannell received from Nathan Wright's secretary.

Known simply as, "The Black Power Manifesto," the pamphlet is at once brief, yet exhaustive. It lays out extensive plans for political and economic development in black communities. It stresses the celebration of black historical figures and cultural productions from around the globe. Further, it calls for unity among black religious leaders to develop theological and philosophical approaches to religion that rejects all forms of white supremacy. Black religious leaders were implored to use their worship buildings as houses of planning and strategizing for black power advocates. The writers of the document demanded that any black religious leader who obstructed the advancement of black power be "boycotted, ostracized, criticized, publicized, and rejected by the black community."[71]

Pannell states that he and Skinner spent many hours discussing the manifesto. What emerged from those conversations was not a fear of being rejected by the black community, but a

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Black Lives Matter," *The Morning Call*, July 8, 2017 http://www.mcall.com/news/nationworld/mc-nws-newark-riots-50th-anniversary-20170707-story.html.

[69] Amiri Baraka (1934-2014) was widely considered to be the "Father of Black Arts Movement." A poet and playwright, Baraka and those associated with him created art that expressed the philosophical concerns of the black power movement.

[70] Nathan Wright, "The Black Power Manifesto and Resolutions," Newark: The Conference, 1967.

[71] Wright, 9.

sincere desire to "scratch where our people itched," as Pannell stated to Schuster.[72] Pannell and Skinner spent a week in Newark preaching what one commentator has called, "Black Power Gospel." There are no transcripts of Skinner's sermons from that week. However, found among his papers at the Billy Graham Center Archives is an article by Will Norton, Jr. that connected Skinner's preaching to the black power movement in Newark.[73] Norton sat down with Skinner, Pannell, and other members of their team to talk about how the movement was informing their approach to their revival. Norton quotes both Skinner, Pannell, an associate named Ralph Bell, one right after the other, and what is clear in their words is a formulation of a pro-black identity for their evangelizing mission. Norton writes:

> As we waited for the meal, Skinner said, "We've had a growing realization that if the black community is going to be reached black men will have to do it. Our people are not just going to respond anymore to white leadership." "That's not anti-white necessarily, Pannell explained. "That's just pro-black—black awareness. The black community has got to produce on its own—with the cooperation of the white…" "Up to this time," Ralph Bell explained, "everything black was bad. It used to be saying, 'If you're white, you're all right. If you're black stay back.' And the whole culture of blackness—soul food, kinky hair, the big nose—all of these things were something we were programmed to be ashamed of. Now we have a new awareness that black is beautiful regardless of where we stand or what we look like. We're identifying beauty with our culture. We have found a new kind of freedom, and we're relishing it. The white man is dealing with a new cat. Freedom begins on the inside."[74]

Norton's article also shows the extent to which Skinner and Pannell maintained a pro-evangelical approach. He quotes Skinner as explaining, "Black civil rights leaders tried legislation. They tried brotherhood. They tried marches. They tried sit-ins. We've had riots. Nothing has worked. Only as everyone of us, regardless of what we look like, stands in the presence of God and

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[72] Robert Schuster, "Tape 6," August 18, 2003, in *Interviews of William E. Pannell-Collection 498 at Billy Graham Center Archives at Wheaton College*, MP3 audio, 1:32:46, https://ensemble.wheaton.edu/hapi/v1/contents/permalinks/Jn5o8PFp/view.

[73] Will Norton, Jr. "Black Power Gospel." Papers of Tom Skinner Collection 430, Box 1, Folder 4. Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton College. It is unclear where this article was originally published. The exact date of publication is also unknown.

[74] Norton, "Black Power Gospel."

confess, will we have true love between men."[75] The last line of this quote is an example of Tom Skinner's evangelical worldview. He believed that conversionism, as defined by D.W. Bebbington, was the only way to resolve the situation in Newark and in other urban areas. In other words, Skinner believed that if people "confessed" faith in Christ, social conditions would change because people would properly relate to one another as spiritual equals.

Will Norton's article offer a nice introduction to thinking about what happened after the TSA's Newark revival. They sum up what I am calling a development of a pro-black biblical hermeneutic and practice that informed how Skinner and Pannell approached evangelism for the next seven years. After Newark, Skinner and Pannell went about the business of developing leadership training for young black evangelicals, conducting revivals in other predominately-black cities, and evangelizing at historically black colleges and universities.[76] Perhaps, the most significant event in TSA history after 1968 was Skinner's appearance at the 1970 InterVarsity Urbana Conference. From a historiographical standpoint, Skinner's speech marked a significant turning point for blacks in evangelicalism, as he was the first black plenary speaker at the conference.

The Urbana conference is generally mentioned in a few brief sentences in most recent publications on evangelicals.[77] Furthermore, Skinner's presence there was engineered by black students who attended the conference in 1967, and were disappointed both by the lack of a black

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[75] Norton, "Black Power Gospel."

[76] Robert Schuster, "Tape 7," August 18, 2003, in *Interviews of William E. Pannell-Collection 498 at Billy Graham Center Archives at Wheaton College*, MP3 audio, 30:23, https://ensemble.wheaton.edu/hapi/v1/contents/permalinks/k9K6CsBb/view.

[77] This includes the Swartz and Gassaway texts mentioned in Notes 3 and 19, respectively. But, I am also including, Frances Fitzgerald's, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* published in 2017 by Simon and Schuster.

presence among the ministry's leadership and by an overemphasis on foreign missions instead of outreach in U.S. cities.[78] Those black students included Carl Ellis, who joined the TSA in 1969 as director of campus ministries. Ellis had been courted by InterVarsity but he felt that Skinner and Pannell's organization had a more immediate relevance to his idea of ministry.

Skinner's sermon, "The U.S. Racial Crisis and World Evangelism," reflected the elements of "The Black Power Manifesto" that resonated with him and Pannell.[79] On the subject of "identity," Skinner first begins his sermon with an examination of the history of blackness in the U.S. He argues that black identity became synonymous with the institution of slavery because of the "high degree of visibility" that blacks had over white indentured servants who could easily assimilate into the population. Skinner then talks about how slavery was upheld by the three systems: political, economic, and religious. Ultimately, he concludes that these three systems served to dehumanize and disenfranchise black people under slavery and then, under segregation. Skinner finally critiques the "strangely silent" evangelical, "bible-believing" community with respect to the black community's plight in America. Elements of Pannell's, *My Friend, The Enemy* shows up in the speech as Skinner chastises white evangelicals for preaching to black folks who dared to advocate for civil rights, a message of love in the form of "love your enemy," or "do good to them that hurt you."[80] Skinner then states, "But no one ever talked about a message, which would also speak to the oppressor."[81] White evangelicals never considered

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[78] Edward Gilbreath's, "A Prophet of Harlem," which is the first major examination of Tom Skinner offers a detailed account of Urbana '67 and the work of students to secure a black presence at the Urbana '70. This article was published by *Christianity Today* in 1996. He published a more detailed version of the article in book, *Reconciliation Blues: A Black Evangelical's Inside View of White Christianity* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006). That chapter is the only extended biographical study of Skinner to date.
[79] Tom Skinner, "The U.S. Racial Crisis and World Evangelism." December 1970. https://mem.intervarsity.org/resources/tom-skinners-urbana-70-address-racism-and-world-evangelism.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.

their role in black oppression, and never thought to uplift blacks with a Gospel message that affirmed their worth and dignity as black men. Skinner points out that those messages—those that spoke to the oppressor and affirmed black identity as having value—only came from civil rights activists and black nationalists, namely Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, and H. Rap Brown. Skinner then connects their messages to God. He again chastises white evangelicals for believing that they could dismiss men like Malcolm or Martin Luther King, Jr. because they were not considered to be members of the "born again" again community. However, Skinner explains that those civil rights leaders both spoke the truth about race and racism in the U.S. He goes on to advise, "My friends, you must accept the fact that all truth is God's truth, no matter who it comes from."[82]

After Skinner deals with the matter of "identity," specifically black identity, he focuses on concepts of "power" and "community" that have implications for blacks and whites, for those who would be thought of as oppressed and as oppressor. Skinner cites "Americanism" as a false power in evangelical culture. Skinner references Matthew 4: 1-11, and he argues that America represents a "kingdom of this world" under Satan's authority. Skinner declares that as a "black Christian," he could never "believe that a vote for America was a vote for God." This is the first example he uses to define what he means by, "Americanism." He goes on to explain that he could never believe that, "God is on our side" in matters of foreign policy. This is second example. Ultimately, he understood that "Americanism" had nothing to do with submitting to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, but with the interests of white men. For Skinner and Pannell, true power and community was defined by a person's orientation towards Jesus Christ. Moreover, Jesus Christ, as defined in Skinner's Urbana speech, and in his subsequent works,

[82] See Note 80.

How Black is The Gospel (1970) and *Words of Revolution* (1970) was a "radical" and a "militant" who modeled how to change an oppressive system of government.

Skinner explains that what made Jesus so radical was rooted in 1 Corinthians 1:28. From his speech the text reads, "He has chosen things low and contemptible, mere nothings, to overthrow the existing order." Skinner reads his passage from the New English Bible, and then he accentuates it with, "That's the Word of God."[83] When I consider the context in which Skinner is quoting one Corinthians 1:28, I understand him to be interpreting this text from both a pro-black *and* pro-evangelical worldview. Skinner was acutely aware of how "blackness" was regarded in evangelicalism and in Americanism. Ultimately, Skinner is using that text to say that God was using blackness, a concept under the system of racism that was deemed, "low, contemptible, mere nothings," to overthrow white supremacy in the political, economic, and religious realms.

By insisting on his identity as a "black man," in this speech, and in a later works where he makes statements such as, "So I know who I am. I am a black man in whom Jesus Christ is living. A black man with his two feet planted on the earth who has the privilege of having the God of heaven and earth living in him," Skinner is clearly articulating a pro-black identity.[84] Further, he is doing so with the full affirmation that Jesus Christ resides in his black being. As an evangelical, Skinner not only looked to the bible as the final authority, he truly believed that the spirit of Jesus Christ began living inside of him at the time of his conversion. Therefore, what we see in Tom Skinner is a full realization of a pro-black and pro-evangelical identity. This is significant because Skinner's decisive message to white evangelicals was this: the adoption of a

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[83] See Note 80.
[84] Tom Skinner*, How Black Is The Gospel* (Philadelphia: J. P. Lipponcott Company, 1970), 81.

pro-black orientation could bring them more fully into the revolutionary nature of Jesus Christ. If they did not think of themselves as "superior," they could be in equal fellowship with blacks and others they sought to evangelize.

Skinner ends his Urbana speech with the declaration, "The liberator has come!"[85] Skinner was of course, referring to Jesus Christ's ability to liberate and revolutionize evangelical community. However, I agree with Edward Gilbreath's conclusion that Skinner himself was also a liberator; Gilbreath's groundbreaking article on Tom Skinner frames him as a liberator an entire generation of black college students who left Urbana and went on to assume leadership in evangelical ministries and in society.[86] Gilbreath's article includes quotes from the likes of Ron Potter, Kay Coles James, and A.G. Miller who were all young, black evangelicals who benefitted from the TSA's initiatives on college campuses and urban cities.[87]

I want to push further than Gilbreath has and think briefly about Tom Skinner's role as a liberator of black biblical interpretation. His heavy reliance upon the New Testament was unique for a twentieth-century black public speaker and leader. The work of Eddie Glaude, Allen Callahan, and Herbert Marbury have demonstrated that black leaders have traditionally drawn upon the Exodus narrative to both establish a national identity in the U.S., and to shape their quests for justice and equality. Further, the groundbreaking text, *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* includes several essays that reiterate the fact that many blacks, especially former slaves, refused to read the Pauline epistles.[88] Texts like, Ephesians 6:5, for example, were reminders of how the bible was used by masters and white preachers to

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[85] See Note 80.
[86] See, Ed Gilbreath's article, "A Prophet out of Harlem," in Note 79.
[87] For more information on these theologians and political figures, see Note 79.
[88] Cain Hope Felder, ed. *Stony The Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1991).

reinforce their inferiority as slaves.[89] However, I think that Tom Skinner is an important contributor to African American biblical interpretation for two reasons. One, Skinner effectively reclaimed the New Testament as a critical source to redirect how the bible informed social relationships between blacks and whites in the U.S. The examples from his Urbana speech show that Skinner was able to use the New Testament to show that blacks were not only equal to whites; the bible justified their attempts to struggle against white supremacy. Two, Skinner's embrace of the black power movement challenges the assertion that blacks who interpreted the bible from outside of the confines of historic black denominations were ashamed of their racial identity. Skinner is important for studies on African American biblical hermeneutics because his story adds more diversity to the existing story.

Stony the Road We Trod is such a significant text because it established African American biblical interpretation as an academic discipline. This means that scholars working in the field of black biblical hermeneutics since 1991 has had to reckon with this collection of essays at some point in their intellectual careers. Vincent L. Wimbush's essay, "The Bible and African Americans," suggests that black Christians who did not belong to historically black denominations believed that "anything distinctively black is inadequate in the white world."[90] Therefore, they joined what he calls "white fundamentalist communities." Skinner was not a fundamentalist. His writings and his work reflect a commitment to evangelical religion as defined by D.W. Bebbington.[91] However, Wimbush makes a brief reference to the NBEA, an organization that Skinner was attached to as a founder and member, and an organization that

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[89] See for example, Renita Weems, "African American Women and the Bible" in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1991), 57-80.

[90] Vincent L. Wimbush, "The Bible and African Americans," in in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1991), 97.

[91] Bebbington's definition is included in the Introduction of this study.

would have attracted blacks who identified themselves as evangelicals and as fundamentalists. This reference to the NBEA indicates that Wimbush believed that members of this organization believed that black identity was inferior, or to use his term, "inadequate." Tom Skinner's life and work, and several men that I will discuss in the next chapter, shows that this was not the case for all black people who were connected to the NBEA. However, I think Wimbush's essay is one of the reasons why scholars of liberal black biblical interpretation have overlooked black evangelicals.[92] The essay assumes that black evangelicals could not be proud of their blackness and interpret the bible in ways that affirmed the history and culture of black people in the U.S. Tom Skinner and many other black evangelicals proved that this was untrue.

In addition to evangelizing from an African American perspective, Skinner and Pannell used the TSA to promote racial reconciliation among evangelicals and community with people irrespective of their faith traditions. Skinner once explained:

> I have solved the problem of community. The gospel of Jesus Christ solves that problem. I now know who my neighbor is: He is any person I come into contact with, he is all the people of the world…My attitude toward my neighbor is: Because Jesus Christ is alive in me, all I ask is to love you. Whether you love me back or not is unimportant.[93]

Recall from the examples from Skinner's Urbana speech, his critique of evangelicals who emphasized those scriptures on love as a means of preaching the gospel to blacks. This quote demonstrates a new approach to love and community that shifts the responsibility for loving on the person who is convinced that "Jesus Christ" is alive in them. Skinner believed that if a person converted to Christianity, he or she had Jesus Christ's very person living within them, and

[92] I do not completely disagree with Wimbush's comments. I have come across evidence to show that some blacks did in fact believe that black identity was inferior to whiteness. I discuss that evidence in Chapter 4. However, Wimbush's generalized statement takes away from the diversity of thought around black identity that was present among black evangelical Christians in the 1960s and 1970s.

[93] Skinner, *How Black is the Gospel*, 82.

therefore they were a new creation (1 Corinthians 5:17), and they were one in Christ (Galatians 3:28).[94] Though Skinner and Pannell formed the TSA as an all-black organization to reach black people, Skinner and Pannell worked tirelessly with white evangelicals to address the problem of racism in the U.S., and to promote healthy relationships across racial and cultural lines. For examples, in 1973, Pannell represented the TSA at a conference for the evangelical left in Chicago. Pannell became one of the principle writers for a document known as, "The Chicago Declaration."[95] The TSA also provided resources to white churches on race in the U.S.[96] Pannell recalls that the TSA also attracted the support of "just about anybody who wouldn't attend a Graham event."[97] Though they remained true to the "gospel message," the TSA's commitment to social justice connected them to other like-minded individuals.[98] The TSA not only pursed this commitment through ministry, but also in politics, as Skinner represented the association as the Vice President of Evangelicals for McGovern.[99]

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[94] These scriptures come up in Skinner's text, *If Christ is the Answer, What Are The Questions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 62.

[95] See Swartz's essay, "Identity Politics and the Fragmenting of the 1970s Evangelical Left" in Note 2 for more information on this conference.

[96] For example, a document titled, "Re: Bibliography on Books to be Read by White People," that all deal with race in the U.S. is found among Tom Skinner's papers. It is unclear how this document was disseminated among whites. Papers of Tom Skinner Collection 430, Box 1, Folder 6. Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton College.

[97] Robert Schuster, "Tape 7," August 18, 2003, in *Interviews of William E. Pannell-Collection 498 at Billy Graham Center Archives at Wheaton College*, MP3 audio, 30:23, https://ensemble.wheaton.edu/hapi/v1/contents/permalinks/k9K6CsBb/view.

[98] Ibid., Robert Schuster, "Tape 7," August 18, 2003, in *Interviews of William E. Pannell-Collection 498 at Billy Graham Center Archives at Wheaton College*, MP3 audio, 30:23, https://ensemble.wheaton.edu/hapi/v1/contents/permalinks/k9K6CsBb/view.

[99] A letter drafted by "Evangelicals for McGovern" in Skinner's papers show an alliance between evangelicals across the political spectrum that encouraged friends of the ministries to consider George McGovern as president for his platform on poverty, racial justice, and opposition to the Vietnam war. The letter was intended to generate monetary support for the campaign. Papers of Tom Skinner Collection 430, Box 1, Folder 5. Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton College.

As the TSA increasingly pursued politics, they became maligned within the broader evangelical movement. They were charged with being "too political," but when I consider the sources of those charges, I believe Skinner and Pannell were simply becoming "too pro-black" for their white evangelical friends. However, I find it ironic that Skinner and Pannell were considered "too black" for white evangelicals. As explained in my Vincent Wimbush example, scholars have deemed these men as "not black enough" to examine as academic subjects in religious studies on black people. This is not only the case in the field of black biblical interpretation, but even in the field of black religious history.

For example, Curtis J. Evans's article, "White Evangelical Protestant Responses to the Civil Rights Movement," points to white evangelicals as being the "fiercest critics" of Martin Luther King, Jr. because he appealed to the federal government to challenge Jim Crow laws in southern states and cities.[100] However, black evangelicals like E.V. Hill, was also a fierce critic of King, Jr. and the civil rights movement. Evans's article demonstrates that the religious term "evangelical" is conflated with the racial identity of "whiteness." Yet, the examples of Tom Skinner and William Pannell show that their embrace of evangelical religion did not diminish neither their identity as black men nor the quality of their efforts to advocate for the rights and freedoms of black people.

Skinner and Pannell's uniqueness as pro-black and pro-evangelical set TSA apart from other ministries. Their pro-blackness allowed them to develop a presence in evangelicalism that was not predicated upon them being "tokens" in a more mainstream ministry. Skinner and Pannell had a space to think, speak, and write from their perspectives as black men in both

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[100] Curtis J. Evans, "White Evangelical Protestant Responses to the Civil Rights Movement," *The Harvard Theological Review* 102:2 (April 2009): 246.

predominately white and black spaces. However, their pro-evangelicalism also allowed them to use their commitment to social justice to form stronger bonds, to create integrated alliances with their white friends who also believed that their religion could enact change with respect to racism, poverty, and other conditions that shaped life in urban areas.

“Agents of the Devil”: Pro-Blackness in Evangelicalism

Tom Skinner’s appearance at Urbana not only opened doors for the TSA with members of the evangelical left, but also those individuals and ministries who were aligned with the right in terms of politics. While leaders of the TSA maintained a productive relationship with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, they were not as successful with Campus Crusade for Christ (CCC). Pannell recalls that they were called by Bill Bright, the founder of CCC, to help the organization to develop their outreach among black college students.[101] Both Skinner and Pannell agreed to go. After two days, they were asked to leave. In short, chaos ensued over the continued use of the word “Negro” by Bill Bright. The TSA team and the college students rejected the use of the word, and insisted that they be referred to as a “black.” Bright insisted on calling them “Negroes” because his close associate, E.V. Hill, preferred being called a “Negro.” Skinner argued with Bright over the matter, and Bright accused him of being “an agent of the devil.” Pannell briefly mentions other doors that were closed to their ministry as they insisted on projecting themselves as “pro-black” and “pro-evangelical.” However, among Skinner’s papers are notices from several radio stations, most notably, World Christian Broadcast declaring that

[101] Robert Schuster, “Tape 6,” August 18, 2003, in *Interviews of William E. Pannell-Collection 498 at Billy Graham Center Archives at Wheaton College*, MP3 audio, 1:32:46, https://ensemble.wheaton.edu/hapi/v1/contents/permalinks/Jn5o8PFp/view.

Skinner's radio shows were no longer going to be aired.[102] In short, the more Skinner and Pannell advocated for themselves, for black people, and for those social conditions that shaped life in U.S. cities, the more they became sidelined and ignored by white evangelicals.

The Decline of the TSA

At the time of this writing, the TSA is now known as Skinner Leadership Institute. It is led by Tom Skinner's second wife, Dr. Barbara Williams-Skinner, and is operated in Tracy's Landing, Maryland. Skinner died there in 1994 at the age of 52 from complications of leukemia. However, the organization declined in the late 1970s for several reasons according to William Pannell. One, the TSA began to lose major sponsorship as they became increasingly involved in politics, particularly, as they continued to address the problem of white supremacy in evangelicalism. Two, as Edward Gilbreath has pointed, the college students that Skinner and Pannell mentored began to grow up and develop their own ministries.[103] Three, Pannell began to feel overburdened in his partnership with Skinner. Skinner, who was the public face of the ministry, maintained a busy speaking schedule, which left Pannell with a lot of administrative work to complete on his own. He would eventually leave the TSA to serve as board member and faculty at Fuller Theological Seminary in 1974, and he remains at Fuller as of 2017 as Professor Emeritus of Preaching. Finally, Skinner's popularity created problems for him at home. Skinner's constant travel kept him away from his first wife, Vivian and their daughters, Lauren and Kyla. While Pannell does not go into detail about Skinner's home life, there is among Skinner's personal papers a *Jet Magazine* gossip column that reports that he had an extramarital affair. This article fills in the gap where Pannell politely and respectfully, suggests the nature of

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[102] "World Christian Broadcast to Tom Skinner." Papers of Tom Skinner Collection 430, Box 1, Folder 5. Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton College.
[103] See Note 79.

Skinner's personal issues in conversation with Robert Schuster.[104] Pannell indicates that once Skinner's infidelity became public, many white evangelicals from the left and the right distanced themselves from him.[105]

Though the TSA eventually drifted from the national evangelical map, as the voice of black evangelicals, after 1979, their historical records show that they William Pannell and Tom Skinner created a novel approach to evangelism and redefined race in evangelicalism during the civil rights-black power eras. They saw themselves as "orphans" in the evangelical movement, so in addition, to confronting the white men who trained them in ministry; they created a home for themselves in the TSA. Furthermore, they opened that home to other young black people who were attempting to define themselves as both black and evangelical. Skinner and Pannell's adoption of a "pro-black" identity privileged "blackness" in evangelicalism by connecting their identity as followers of Christ to their inherent worth and dignity as men living in the United States. Skinner and Pannell fully represent examples of A. G. Miller's definition in Chapter 1 of "race revolutionaries," who worked for social justice within evangelical ministries after the founding of the National Negro Evangelistic Association in 1963. Further, they created space for other black evangelicals to start their own conversations about race in evangelicalism. Several of those men, including, Columbus Salley and John Perkins, will be examined the next chapter.

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[104] Robert Schuster, "Tape 8," March 27, 2007, in *Interviews of William E. Pannell-Collection 498 at Billy Graham Center Archives at Wheaton College*, MP3 audio, 2:20:22, https://ensemble.wheaton.edu/hapi/v1/contents/permalinks/Nt75Lrg8/view.

[105] Tom Skinner eventually rehabilitated his public image. He rebranded the TSA as a leadership institute, and he worked with a variety of organizations including, IBM and the New York Yankees. He also served as team chaplain for the Washington Redskins for over a decade. A eulogy for Skinner noted that Skinner continued be a "bridge person" for the evangelical movement. He not only continued to work to unite whites and blacks, Skinner also worked closely religious leaders from different faiths including, Louis Farrakhan and Betty Shabazz.

This chapter has sought to explain why the TSA became the most significant development in black evangelical history after the founding of NNEA in 1963. The TSA stands out because of the dynamic leadership of Tom Skinner and William Pannell. Skinner and Pannell were two black men who had worked extensively in predominately-white ministries, but they were constantly faced with the problem of racism in those ministries. They wrote articles and books about their experiences to white audiences with the intention of showing white supremacy was detrimental to authentic Christian fellowship. Some whites cast Skinner and Pannell out of their ministries, while some invited them in. Not necessarily to be active members, but as tokens.

In response to their treatment in evangelical ministries, Tom Skinner invited William Pannell to help him to restructure his evangelistic association into one that not only gave them autonomy as black evangelists, but also to address the specific concerns of black people in the U.S. The Newark Riot of 1967 proved to be a watershed moment for the evangelistic partnership of William Pannell and Tom Skinner. The riot provided them with an opportunity to direct their efforts to evangelizing in a manner that was consistent with demands for black power. Thus, their approach to biblical interpretation and preaching was informed by a desire to affirm black identity and to present the Gospel as a starting point for advocating for political, social, and economic rights in the United States. Skinner and Pannell believed that because Gospel taught that all people were equal in Christ, all people should be thought of as equals in U.S. society.

The Urbana conference extended the TSA's outreach from urban cities to include college campuses. Their presence at colleges and universities allowed Skinner and Pannell to influence a host of young black evangelicals who continue to influence evangelical Christianity today. Ultimately, the greatest legacy of the TSA is that its leadership provided models of how to be pro-black and pro-evangelical for black and white evangelical Christians.

CHAPTER 3

The Costs of Black Evangelicals

"What black people are doing is redefining themselves, and as they do, they must redefine Christianity as it relates to them."[1]

-Columbus Salley, 1969

"We began to be put off Christian radio stations and other platforms…we were no longer welcome on. But, they still had to find one of us…they only wanted to deal with one or two of us at a time anyhow. They wanted to find one of us that would be acceptable, and that opened the door for John Perkins and so on and so forth. One of us that they could point to as an exemplar of an evangelical in ministry. And, as long as those guys kept their noses clean—based on the criteria set forth by those institutions—they could be the house darkie for years…by preaching the simple Gospel…[But] What's so simple about the Gospel?"[2]

-William Pannell, 2000

"Why has John Perkins been so successful? Perkins's warm, disarming personality has also enhanced his impact. It is very hard not to like him. He is a delightful person to be with. I suspect even Scrooge would have found him irresistible."[3]

-**Ron Sider, 2013**

In the conclusion of Chapter 2, I asserted that Tom Skinner and William Pannell created space for other black evangelicals to have their own unique conversations about race in the evangelical movement. This chapter examines and analyzes several of the conversations that emerged in that space. My primary questions here are: Who were those other black evangelicals who were responding to black power? How did they use black power concepts to create new possibilities for black and white evangelicals? What were the implications of their engagement with the black power movement? A generalized answer to the first question shows that the black

[1] Dan Orme, "Black Militant Evangelicals: An Interview," The Other Side 5:5 (Oct-Dec, 1969): 23.
[2] Robert Schuster, "Tape 6," August 18, 2003, in *Interviews of William E. Pannell-Collection 498 at Billy Graham Center Archives at Wheaton College*, MP3 audio, 1:32:46, https://ensemble.wheaton.edu/hapi/v1/contents/permalinks/Jn5o8PFp/view.

[3] Ronald J. Sider, "Foreword," in *Mobilizing for the Common Good: The Lived Theology of John M. Perkins* edited by Peter Slade, Charles Marsh, and Peter Godwin Heltzel. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013), XI.

evangelicals who were responding to black power were all men between the ages of 25 and 50.[4] They were primarily living and working in New York, New Jersey, and Chicago. This is significant in this study as most histories on evangelical Christianity focus on the Sunbelt region. Nearly all the men discussed here were educated in white evangelical schools, and they were all married with children at the time of their respective publications.

Like most writing about African American male thinkers, this chapter presents the differences between the men examined here as a simple binary: militant versus assimilationist.[5] However, unlike most writers who employ the binary approach, I want to state at the outset of this section that my categorization of these men should not be read as definitive of the entirety of their thought and bodies of work. I am only examining their theological writing and activism during a brief time in both American history and in their personal and professional lives, the black power era. Also, I want to stress that the militant and assimilationist black evangelicals (hereafter, MBES and ABES) I examine here were more alike than they were different. They were all evangelical Christians, and they were working towards the same goals. They all endeavored to present evangelical Christianity to black people in a manner that made the faith relevant to race, racism, poverty, and other societal concerns. Further, each of the men presented here all wanted to work with white evangelicals to address those inequalities.

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[4] As mentioned in the Introduction, I attempted to add a woman's perspective to my study. Unfortunately, I have not found a black evangelical woman who was writing during the timeframe of my interest. However, I did find a book by Sister Mary Roger Thibodeaux, S.B.S. titled, *A Black Nun Looks at Black Power*. Published by Sheed & Ward in New York in 1972, the book is written as a reflection on black power, the social plight of blacks, and the need for Catholics to become active in black power.

[5] Scholars Robert Levine (1997) and Tunde Adeleke (2003) have both informed my thinking about the limitations of work that uses this method to examine African American leaders. Their respective studies on the abolitionist Martin Delany reveal that he was more nuanced as an activist and thinker than earlier works such as works such as Victor Ullman's 1971 study allowed. In short, Levine and Adeleke both move beyond an understanding of Delany as Frederick Douglass's ideological opponent.

The black evangelicals featured in this chapter also all used the same methods to achieve their goals. They wrote articles for *Christianity Today*, published books for major evangelical publishing houses, and they were all active in all-black *and* interracial evangelical organizations as founders and officers. They worked together and cooperatively in many of those organizations. Finally, they all responded to the black power movement. Some responded more radically. Others responded in more indirect and discreet ways.

MBES found value in interpreting and preaching the Gospel from the perspective of black people in the U.S. Their written work reflects an attempt to provide a black evangelical liberationist theology and spirituality informed by black power that was comparable to the work of Albert Cleage and James Cone, the two black theologians MBES engaged with in their work. Like Cleage and Cone, MBES produced theological writings that presented Jesus as not only concerned with the plight of black people in the U.S., but also depicted Jesus as black. MBES did not argue that Jesus was of African descent, or that Jesus had a certain skin tone. Rather, they saw Jesus as someone whose heart, soul, mind, and body was present with the dispossessed. Further, they argued that because Jesus aligned himself so closely with the oppressed, evangelical Christians had a duty to support the interests of those who were on the margins of society. MBES also frequently excoriated racism and white privilege in evangelical theology and organizations, and they did so boldly. For example, consider the title of Columbus Salley and Ronald Behm's book, *Your God is too White*.[6] This work will be explored below.

ABES engaged with black power more subtly, or they outright rejected the movement, which is also a valid response. This chapter singles out John Perkins as the main representative

[6] Columbus Salley and Ronald Behm, *Your God is too White* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1970).

of ABES because of his relationship to black power. Perkins used the organizing approaches of black power organizations, namely the Nation of Islam (NOI) to minister to black people, specifically, poor black people. However, Perkins did not radically comment on whiteness and its role in shaping evangelical culture. Perkins's approach to the Gospel remained theologically "white," or as William Pannell's opening quote indicates, Perkins preached the "simple Gospel." In other words, Perkins followed the evangelizing mission of Billy Graham. Perkins emphasized the tenets of evangelical Christianity spelled out by D. W. Bebbington, and he commented on race and racism in a manner that benefitted his evangelistic ministries financially. John Perkins did not vehemently speak out against racism in the manner of Skinner and Pannell.

In Chapter 1, I presented Graham's decision to end integrated seating at his southern crusades as a means of broadening his evangelizing reach to black people. Here, I argue that John Perkins did not radically comment on white supremacy because rich, white evangelical leaders funded his ministry projects. While wealthy, white evangelicals were forcing MBES out of meeting rooms, John Perkins and other ABES received permanent, prominent seats the table. Further, their white evangelical contemporaries and many of the white scholars who have written histories of evangelical Christianity have pointed to John Perkins and other ABES as the "exemplars" of black evangelicalism and the ministry of racial reconciliation.

To unpack my arguments in this chapter, I am repeating the task that was before me in Chapter 2. I am recovering the work of three more MBES. In addition to William Pannell and Tom Skinner, Columbus Salley, William H. Bentley, and Clarence Hilliard also embraced the black power movement; they incorporated the ideologies and language of black power in their theological writings and organizing in creative and meaningful ways. Salley, Bentley, and Hilliard engaged with black power using methods that were distinct from Pannell and Skinner.

However, ultimately, they all—Skinner and Pannell included—faced a similar cost: the pushback occurring when they attempted authentic racial reconciliation with many white evangelical leaders and ministries. I am also making an intervention in the scholarship and journalistic writing on John Perkins. Much of that work wrestles with the question of John Perkins's success in evangelical ministry. I argue here that John Perkins's ministry has been successful at demonstrating how entrenched white supremacy was—and continues to be—in the evangelical movement.

My argument here is that MBES offered the sincerest approach to bridging relations between black and white evangelicals. Their writings reflect a common, and uncompromising, call for white evangelicals to renounce the American system of race relations by following the example of Jesus Christ. White evangelicals were challenged to die to their sense of superiority over blacks by relinquishing the privileges of whiteness. If white evangelicals could accept and attempt this challenge, MBES proposed that blacks and whites could be properly reconciled to one another as equals in Christ and in society. Some white evangelicals accepted this call. One of them, Ronald Behm, the frequent writing partner of Columbus Salley, will be discussed here. However, many evangelicals could not fathom a country, let alone a ministry, that was not predicated upon white supremacy and privilege. Rather than working with men like Salley and Hilliard, white evangelicals either left organizations and churches, or they expelled MBES from their ranks and aligned themselves with ABES, like John Perkins.

John Perkins is the most well-known black evangelical to emerge from the black power era. While William Pannell, Tom Skinner, and the other MBES mentioned above are referenced briefly in paragraphs and footnotes of evangelical histories, whole chapters and monographs

have been dedicated to the study of Perkins.[7] Pannell's comments on Perkins in the opening quotes of this chapter provides a rather harsh, but believable, and unexplored, rationale for why Perkins has been given such scholarly and popular attention. In short, Pannell suggests that Perkins engaged the issue of race in a manner that was acceptable and agreeable to white evangelicals. Perkins did not become "too political" by engaging with black power in his theological imagination with respect to his writing.[8]

At a moment when MBES were releasing titles such as, *Words of Revolution* and *My Friend, The Enemy*, John Perkins published two books, *Let Justice Roll Down: John Perkins Tells His Own Story* and *A Quiet Revolution: The Christian Response To Human Need…A Response for Today* in 1976.[9] These book titles reveal much about Perkins's staunch biblicism, or his believe that all spiritual truth and authority is found in biblical texts. While the former book title references Amos 5:24, a clear indication to the role of biblical authority in his autobiography, the latter title, is a subtle nod to the revolutionary tenor of the 1970s.[10] Perkins did not make his theology "black," but his approach to ministry as manifested in Voice of Calvary Ministries (hereafter, VOC) in Mendenhall, Mississippi was clearly an evangelical response to the programs for economic justice that came out of the NOI.

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[7] For example, Peter G. Heltzel's *Jesus and Justice* includes a chapter on Perkins titled, "The Christian Community Development Association: A Quiet Revolution." While Martin Luther King erroneously emerges in the text as a black evangelical hero, Perkins is presented as a successor to King.
[8] Recall from Chapter 2, being "too political" was a critique leveled at Pannell and Skinner for advocating for black civil rights.
[9] The first two titles were discussed at length in Chapter 2 of this study. The Perkins's books will be cited throughout this chapter.
[10] From the NRSV, Amos 5:24 reads, "But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." The decade of the seventies not only saw the full rise and rapid decline of the black power movement, society was also adjusting to shifts in the women's rights movement, gay rights, and anti-Vietnam war demonstrations.

In a 1976 interview with *Christianity Today*, Perkins credits the NOI with informing his ideas about economic justice for poor blacks.[11] Like leaders from the NOI, Perkins saw economic self-sufficiency as the primary answer for poor blacks. He designed VOC to provide blacks in Mississippi with practical resources such as, health care and voter education, to improve their social and political plights. VOC also encouraged its largely black constituency to extend loving forgiveness to white oppressors. Perkins's message to whites, particularly rich, conservative whites, has focused on economic redistribution. In short, Perkins encouraged white evangelicals to make charitable contributions to VOC to support economic justice for blacks. Further, he emphasized a commitment to Jesus Christ as the only means of healing for whites and blacks in the U.S. In this manner, John Perkins became the ideal black evangelical to discuss when the topic of race and racial reconciliation arises in evangelical studies.

From 1976 to 2013, scholarly and journalistic writing on John Perkins has been consistent in interrogating his success in ministry. Where Cheryl J. Sanders, Ron Sider, and Kenneth Young have presented Perkins as a successful leader in racial reconciliation, Michael Emerson and Christian Smith have suggested that he has failed in his efforts. I demonstrate in this chapter that John Perkins's approach to racial reconciliation has served the interests of white evangelicals at the expense of poor black people. His model leaves institutional racism unchecked. So, while poor blacks have received, and continue to receive, invaluable resources from Perkins's organizations, many of them are still faced with the same systemic issues, like racism, that keep them in poverty and in prison.

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[11] "The Mendenhall Model Answers the Black Muslims," *Christianity Today*, January 30, 1976, 8-13.

Further, writings about John Perkins from white evangelical scholars and journalists contain emasculating language that can be read as paternalistic and racist. I explore two essays about evangelical scholars and activists, Ronald J. Sider and Stephen E. Berk, to demonstrate how that language reveals another critical reason why evangelicals have consistently supported Perkins financially. Finally, my examination on Perkins will conclude with a brief discussion on race, evangelicalism, and consumerism. Perkins essentially provides us with one distinct model of how white evangelicals have preferred to consume, market, and promote blackness. In the next few sections, I will consider how MBES redefined blackness in evangelical movements, and then conclude the chapter with the discussion on how Perkins became the singular representative of all of black evangelicalism.

The Rise of MBES

In 1969, eight black men sat down with Dan Orme of *Freedom Now Magazine* to discuss the emergence of a "Christian form of black power."[12] The article that came out of that conversation was titled, "Black Militant Evangelicals: An Interview," and throughout the five-page piece, each man addressed how the broader black power movement shaped their shared approach to evangelical Christianity. On the idea of "revolution," Carl Ellis and John Skinner explained that Jesus modeled revolutionary behavior by overthrowing the "old laws" and replacing that system with one that considered a "person's heart-relationship with God."[13] Henry Greenridge and Joseph R. Hickman described the phrase, "black is beautiful." They emphasized that they did not use the expression to create division between black and white Christians.

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[12] Orme, 21. Also, I need to mention that the magazine, *Freedom Now* was previously published as, *The Other Side*, an influential magazine for the evangelical left that often featured the articles of black writers, many of whom are featured in this study.
[13] Ibid., 21.

Greenridge and Hickman argued that reclaiming blackness as positive and sacred in a society that negated black humanity was a testament to the redeeming power of Christ. Black power gave them a platform to assert themselves as full citizens and as full Christians.

Matthew Parker went further to suggest that whites created all division between black and white evangelicals. Parker states:

> White Christians dictate to black Christians what we should do, how we should do it, what we shouldn't do, how we should live, and everything else. Most black evangelicals who have any training whatsoever have gotten it from white institutions and therefore have been taught white philosophy, white ideas, and white methods. Now we are saying, "I have my own ideas, my own perspective in all these areas." This is how the black Christian feels today. This is a threat to the white structure, to the white evangelical.[14]

As the conversations went on, it becomes clearer that the "black militant evangelicals" were not simply talking about having their own ideas. Parker, Sidney Gravney, Philip Bingham, and Columbus Salley all elucidated on how they believed those ideas could be implemented. They each commented on the need for black-led educational and evangelistic institutions to perform three critical tasks. They tasked those organizations with transmitting values that positively affirmed and represented black identity and culture, addressing the social and political concerns of black communities, and emphasizing that "oneness" in Christ between black and white Christians should also be the basis for equality between blacks and whites as U.S. citizens.

Dan Orme does not highlight the institutional affiliations of any of the eight men he interviews, nor does he provide any concrete examples of how those black men were working to manifest their "Christian form of black power" in their churches and their communities. Of the eight, only three have a documented history of merging their black power ideals with evangelical

[14] Ibid., 22.

Christianity. This documentation exists because of their affiliations with the Tom Skinner and William Pannell.

Carl Ellis, as mentioned in earlier sections of this project, was an influential leader in InterVarsity. Ellis was instrumental in inviting Tom Skinner to that organization's triennial, Urbana Conference in 1970. I suspect that his participation in Orme's interview came about to promote his efforts to add diversity to InterVarsity.[15] Ellis worked for the TSA as a Senior Campus Minister from 1969 to 1979. From Skinner's personal papers, I have deduced that Ellis's responsibilities included organizing Skinner and Pannell's speaking engagements a historically black colleges and universities, conducting revivals at these venues, and mentoring black students who converted to Christianity.[16]

Henry Greenridge also worked with the TSA as the Director of Creative Arts.[17] Greenridge served as a musical director for Soul Liberation, the band that opened for all of Tom Skinner's revivals.[18] Greenridge, who believed that soul music served as a "strong vehicle of communication" for blacks and young people in attendance at Skinner's rallies, created the

[15] Ed Gilbreath's brief chapter on Tom Skinner in *Reconciliation Blues* offers a few details about Carl Ellis and his advocacy for Skinner's participation at InterVarsity. Ellis worked for InterVarsity between 1967 and 1970 to assist with addressing the concerns of black students who attended their conferences. I suspect this is why he may have participated in the article. Dan Orme, other than mentioning that the eight men had all been students a white, evangelical schools, he does not set up the article to provide any credentials about the men he interviews. I researched each man, but as stated in the text, I was only able to track those individuals who had some level of association with Tom Skinner. I confirmed that the "Henry Greenridge" who is featured in Orme's article is the same man who worked for Skinner's association because he is the only one who talks about soul music in his interview blurb, and the "Henry Greenridge" who worked for Skinner was the Director of Creative Arts and leader of the association's band, Soul Liberation.
[16] An article from a TSA event at Hampton University titled, "Blacks Respond at Hampton," details some of the activities at the event that provides some insight into Ellis's role at the TSA. Carl Ellis remains active in campus ministry and as a professor at Reformed Theological Seminary. The article is found in Papers of Tom Skinner Collection 430, Box 1, Folder 4. Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton College.
[17] A TSA flyer found in Skinner's papers lists Greenridge's position with the TSA. "TSA Flyer." Papers of Tom Skinner Collection 430, Box 1, Folder 4. Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton College.
[18] The group had a rather successful recording career that lasted into the 1980s.

group's sound: a fusion of funk, soul, and R&B.[19] However, the group's lyrics ultimately won converts to Christ. Greenridge worked alongside Skinner in fundraising campaigns for the TSA by writing letters to potential donors with testimonials from young people who "received Christ" after hearing the band perform.[20]

There is no evidence to confirm if Columbus Salley ever worked directly with the TSA. Although Salley was a native of Chicago, he was largely based out of the East Coast. He worked as an editor for Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., in New York, and then as a teacher and administrator in Newark, New Jersey throughout the 1970s and 1980s.[21] So, it is plausible that Salley could have participated in a TSA event due to the organization's many connections in those states. However, records confirm that Skinner and Salley did work together in two other organizations: The National Negro Evangelical Association (NNEA) and Evangelicals for McGovern. Skinner was a co-founder of NNEA in 1963. It is unclear when Salley joined the group, and if he held any executive position with the association. However, his 1969 keynote address at NNEA's convention in Atlanta sparked a critical turning point in the organization's history.

In short, Salley encouraged the NNEA to embrace black power. He insisted that the NNEA abandon its integrated approach to leadership in favor of all-black leaders. Further, he demanded that the group begin to develop spiritual and intellectual resources that derived out of

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[19] Orme, 5.

[20] Among Skinner's papers is an example of such a letter. After leaving the TSA, Greenridge founded Irvington Covenant Church, a multiracial fellowship in Portland, Oregon. "TSA Correspondence." Papers of Tom Skinner Collection 430, Box 1, Folder 5. Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton College.

[21] It is unclear whether Harcourt Brace Jovanovich's 1982 move to Florida and California ended Salley's tenure with them, or if he left the company before the move.

the black American experience of Christianity.[22] Salley's speech struck a chord with younger militants in the group. At the 1970 convention, they repeated his demands, and pushed further by calling up on the NNEA to distance itself from Billy Graham and his support of the Nixon campaign. The NNEA responded to the Salley and his followers in three ways.

First, in 1972, Salley and Skinner both represented the NNEA as executive officers on the committee, Evangelicals for McGovern. The all-male, interracial board issued a fundraising letter encouraging evangelicals to vote for George McGovern to "end the stereotype that evangelical theology automatically means a politics unconcerned about the poor, minorities, and unnecessary military expenditures."[23]

Second, the NNEA experienced a population shift as the tenor of the membership increasingly turned radical. By the early 1970s, most of the white members exited the organization.[24] Whites had previously comprised one-third of the NNEA's constituency. Finally, the NNEA voted to drop the word, "Negro" in favor of "Black" at its 1974 convention in Pittsburgh.[25]

Finally, in addition to his activism, Salley was also a co-author on a book on race and theology. His work, *Your God is too White*, has been cited as, "the handbook for militant Black Evangelicals."[26] The book's first four chapters offer an overview of black history from slavery to the 1960s in a manner that resembles the historical surveys offered in Skinner and Pannell's

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[22] There is no documentation of Salley's speech. However, William Bentley's 1979 history of the NBEA offers the only primary source accounting of what happened at those conventions. The book titled, *The National Black Evangelical Association: Reflections on the Evolution of a Concept of Ministry* was self-published by Bentley.
[23] "Evangelicals for McGovern Flyer." Papers of Tom Skinner Collection 430, Box 1, Folder 5. Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton College.
[24] Bentley, 20.
[25] Ibid., 20.
[26] See, Ron Potter's essay, "The New Black Evangelicals" in *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979* edited by Gayraud Wilmore and James Cone. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1979): 305.

writings and speeches reviewed in the second chapter of this study. Salley is also interested in spelling out the ways in which Christianity played a role in both slavery and segregation. However, there are three critical distinctions between Salley and the MBES examined in the previous chapter.

One, *Your God is too White* was co-written by Ronald Behm, a white evangelical pastor who pastored a predominately black church on the South Side of Chicago. The book was the first on Christianity and race to be written by an inter-racial writing team, which is one of the reasons the book is often mentioned in studies on race and evangelicalism.[27] Two, the book is polemical like Pannell's, but Skinner's works are more sermonic. Salley and Behm, like Pannell, also utilized methods from history, sociology, and African American literature to support their arguments. Three, the book offers a more complete understanding of Salley's views on black power than the Dan Orme article allowed.

The historical records on Salley are not clear on how he met Ronald Behm, or on why he decided to write *Your God is too White* with him. However, I have made several assumptions. Both men were native Chicagoans. They could have met through school, church, or one of the many evangelical parachurch ministries that hosted events in that city in the 1950s and 1960s.[28] They could have also been related through marriage as Behm was married to a black woman named, Barbara Jean, and there is very little information on her life before their marriage.[29]

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[27] Potter's essay establishes this fact, but the work is also cited in David Schwartz (2012) and other recent studies on the evangelical left and race.

[28] For example, Youth for Christ, the organization that launched Billy Graham's, and to some extent, William Pannell's career was active in Chicago.

[29] What little information I found on Ronald Behm was an obituary found on the Evangelical Society website, and a *Jet Magazine* article from 1982 that details his grisly murder at the hands of his stepson. The stepson also killed his mother, Behm's wife, and his younger brother, Matthew (6), who was Behm's son. Behm's daughter with Barbara Jean, Rhonda, was 9 and away at camp during the murders. Jackson killed his family over a dispute about his unemployment and house rules. The links to these articles are found here:

Another possibility is that Behm could have been a member of the NNEA, and he met Salley through that organization. Finally, it is possible that Salley and Behm met in, or around, New York. In addition to working in both New York and New Jersey, Salley earned his Ed.D. from the University of Pennsylvania, but it is unknown where he matriculated for his undergraduate work. Behm's professional life was largely based out of Chicago, but he graduated from Nyack Missionary College in 1965 in New York. So, it is possible they could have met during their time on the East Coast.

Of the two men, Ronald Behm's appears to have had a theological education and he worked as a minister. As mentioned above, Columbus Salley primarily worked in the education sector. Neither man achieved the acclaim of Tom Skinner or William Pannell in evangelical circles. Therefore, what is intriguing about their partnership is that they represent every day, ordinary evangelicals who were making sense of their faith and the call for black power through their writing project, published in 1970 by InterVarsity Press. Columbus Salley and Ronald Behm were not the only Christians who making sense of their faith and the black power movement. The next section considers the publishing milieu into which Salley and Behm's work entered.

Black Christians and Black Power: A Scholarly Overview

By 1970, the black power movement captured the attention of a wide range of black Christian clergy and intellectuals. Since the inception of the movement in 1966, black caucuses

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https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=7&ved=0ahUKEwij1f7Pt6HYAhUl2IMKHTlRAQQQFghJMAY&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.etsjets.org%2Ffiles%2FJETS-PDFs%2F28%2F28-1%2F28-1-pp125-127_JETS.pdf&usg=AOvVaw2xbK-kMzqAhbPvPbz9fp2p. And, here: https://books.google.com/books?id=BLgDAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA8&dq=ronald+behm&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi-6fbEuKHYAhWS2YMKHexhCKkQ6AEIOjAD#v=onepage&q=ronald%20behm&f=false.

emerged in the Unitarian, Catholic, Presbyterian and Episcopal churches. Charles V. Hamilton has explained, "The central thrust of these new groups was to redefine the meaning and role of the church and religion in the lives of black people."[30] Members of those caucuses joined under the umbrella of the National Committee of Negro Churchmen and issued a joint statement in *The New York Times*.[31] The theological manifesto defines and supports the black power movement. The signatories explained how the Gospel related to the black community's need for power to properly reconcile themselves to their own identity as a people, and as a foundation for their full participation in American democracy.[32] Further, the manifesto offers a direct warning to white church leaders. They advise, "So long as white churchmen continue to moralize and misinterpret Christian love, so long will justice continue to be subverted in this land."[33] In addition to the work in denominations and black ecumenical groups, a host of writers and scholars began publishing the foundational texts of the field of "black theology."[34] While "black theology" includes the writing of all black people who were writing about God and American society during this particular era, the work examined below is limited to those individuals who were producing Christian theological works.

Albert Cleage, a controversial pastor based out of Detroit, published *The Black Messiah* in 1968.[35] The collection of sermons argue that Jesus was a black revolutionary who provided

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[30] Charles Hamilton, *The Black Preacher in America* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1972), 140.
[31]See, "Statement By National Committee of Negro Churchmen," *The New York Times, July 31, 1966* in *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979* edited by Gayraud Wilmore and James Cone. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1979): 25-26.
[32] Nathan Wright, who was influential in Newark during Skinner and Pannell's campaign there, was a signatory. Gayraud Wilmore whose work is refenced throughout this chapter also signed the statement.
[33] Wilmore and Cone, 26.
[34] This broad term is not exclusive to Christianity, it also includes the varied theological perspectives of all black people of faith.
[35] Cleage (1911-2000) had an interesting career in ministry. Prior to developing an all-black denomination known as Black Christian Nationalism in 1972, Cleage worked with two interracial congregations between 1940 and 1964. The most notable of the two was, The Fellowship for all People in San Francisco. When Cleage left, the influential

spiritual liberation for black people around the globe.[36] Cleage called upon blacks to abandon all American images of Jesus as a white man. For Cleage, these images conflated Christianity with white supremacy. And, he preached that blacks could only become free from oppression by moving away from biblical teachings on "individual salvation and life after death," to embracing the revolutionary teachings of the historic Jesus. Cleage taught that Jesus, "went about among the people of Israel, seeking to root out the individualism and the identification with their oppressor which had corrupted them, and to give them faith in their own power to rebuild the Nation."[37] Cleage's book served as the foundation of his Black Christian Nationalist Movement, an all-black denomination originally founded in Detroit.[38]

In 1969, James Cone, a professor of systematic theology at Union Theological Seminary, began developing black liberation theology. The field of study privileges the black experience—over the bible—as the critical starting point for establishing theological truths. Cone began his theological project in direct response to the black power movement and the urban unrest following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. His books, *Black Theology and Black Power* (1969) and *A Black Theology of Liberation* (1970) repeats some of the same sentiments found in Cleage's writing, but Cone maintained a commitment to racial reconciliation that was predicated upon Pauline teachings in a manner that Cleage rejected. In short, Cone argued that

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Christian mystic, Howard Thurman succeeded him. At the root of Cleage's issues with these churches was his racial politics, particularly his embrace of the Nation of Islam.

[36] Albert Cleage, *The Black Messiah* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968).

[37] Cleage, 3-4.

[38] The denomination is now known as the Pan-African Orthodox Church and has operations in Atlanta, Houston, and other parts of the U.S. and abroad. Shortly after changing the name of his church, Cleage would adopt the Swahili name, "Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman," which means, "liberator, holy man, savior of the nation." Cleage is also known as the father of Pearl Cleage, an influential writer and playwright whose work examines the intersections of racism and sexism.

racial reconciliation could only take place when black people defined the terms of the reconciliation.[39]

In his 1969 work, Cone defines black power as, "Christ's central message to twentieth-century America."[40] He goes on to state, "And, unless the empirical denominational church makes a determined effort to recapture the man Jesus through a total identification with the suffering of the poor as expressed in Black Power, the church will become exactly what Christ is not."[41] Cone goes on to excoriate white American Christianity for its oppressive nature, and ultimately, articulates a theology that demands a redistribution of white political power. The 1970 book further connects the historical Jesus to "blackness" by emphasizing that Christ himself was presented as "oppressed" in the New Testament.[42]

Other black theologians including, J. Deotis Roberts, Vincent Harding, and Gayraud Wilmore made significant contributions to black theology during the black power era.[43] However, what is intriguing about this flourishing of black theological writing during this era is that prominent scholars of black power have noted that the movement itself was "de-Christianized." Wilmore, referenced above, coined this term in 1973 in his text, *Black Religion*

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[39] See Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation-Fortieth Anniversary Edition*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2010): Kindle Location 109 of 3133.
[40] Cone, *Black Power and Black Theology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), 1.
[41] Ibid., 1.
[42] Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation-Fortieth Anniversary Edition,* Kindle Location: 2466 of 3133.
[43] J. Deotis Roberts has recently re-gained national attention outside of the Academy when it was revealed that he was the father of Zane, a prolific and provocative writer of black, urban erotica who used the pseudonym out of respect for her father's role as a theologian and professor of divinity. Before this detail, emerged Roberts was known for his books, *Liberation and Reconciliation* (1971) and *A Black Political Theology* (1974). Perhaps, the major difference between Roberts and Cone is that Roberts's view of racial reconciliation was more conciliatory than Cone's. Roberts also did not demand that whites worship a "black Christ." Harding is more commonly known for his work as a speechwriter for Martin Luther King. He authored King's speech on Vietnam delivered at Riverside Church in New York in 1967. Harding's essay, "Black Power and the American Christ," offered another scathing attack on white Christian supremacy. It is featured in an edited volume titled, *The Black Revolt*.

and Black Radicalism.[44] Yet, Judson L. Jeffries offers a definition of "de-Christianization" in 2006 that he applied to the black power movement. Judson explains:

> Another fact worth mentioning is that Christianity did not play a prominent role in the Black Power Movement like it did in the Civil Rights Movement. None of the commonly known leaders of the movement manifested a positive view of Christianity. This is not to say that religion did not have a place within the Black Power Movement; it did. Indeed, many of the participants were regular churchgoers. A close study of the Black Panther Party, for example, reveals that many Panther chapters had a spiritual advisor—usually a man of the cloth. Moreover, many of their breakfast programs were put in place with the cooperation of local churches. However, for the most part, religion did not figure as prominently in the Black Power Movement as it did in the Civil Rights Movement.[45]

Since 2006, scholars such as Kerry Pimblott, have begun the work of pushing against the de-Christianization model by investigating ways in which Christian leaders did play major roles in the black power movement than previously considered.

Pimblott's work, *Faith in Black Power: Religion, Race, and Resistance in Cairo, Illinois*, shifts attention from the national black power movement to hone in on movement activity at the local level. Pimblott investigates the work of Rev. Charles Koen, founder and leader of The United Front, a black power organization supported by local black churches in Cairo who embraced both Christianity and revolutionary politics. The organization's symbol, a handgun placed on top of a Bible, concisely conveyed their message of an acceptance of black power's advocacy of self-defense, and of their belief in the religious tradition that informed many activists of the southern civil rights movement. Pimblott traces the work of the United Front

[44] Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998). See Chapters 7 & 8. Wilmore argues that as black Christian churches became less radical or more concerned with spiritual blessings and less involved with activism, the black radical tradition became "de-Christianized."

[45] Judson Jeffries, ed., *Black Power in the Belly of the Beast*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 8.

following the 1969 the suspicious death of Robert Hunt, who died while in police custody, to the decline of the black power movement in the late seventies.[46]

Pimblott presents her work as an "upending" of the de-Christianization model.[47] However, I do not think that the model can be completely overturned because for the subjects featured in Jeffries's book, Christianity was not central to the particularities of their experience of the black power movement. However, Christianity was important for Pimblott's subjects. Christianity was also important to my subjects. What is clear from the examples from Cleage and Cone—and what we will see below with the MBES—is that black power and black Christianities were inextricably linked. While none of these men—except for Cleage—is considered black power activists in the available scholarship on black power, they were certainly participants in a broad movement for black power through their intellectual projects.

Therefore, my contribution to the de-Christianization model is to suggest that scholars become more flexible in thinking about how people outside of well-known organizations related to black power. Further, it should be acknowledged that black power played a major role in shaping how black Christians were thinking about and applying their faith. What I see very broadly in black theology is an attempt to revolutionize American Christianity to meet the spiritual, social, and political needs of black people in the U.S. However, the works of MBES are slightly different. They shared the same revolutionary agenda of Cleage and Cone. But, they emphasized biblical authority as the starting point for ascertaining theological truths, not the black experience. For MBES, the black power movement, particularly with respect to pride in

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[46] Pimblott's book was published by the University of Kentucky Press in 2016.

[47] In the dissertation version of her work, Pimblott states "upending" that narrative as one of her goals. See, Pimblott, Kerry Louise, **Soul Power: The Black Church and the Black Power Movement in Cairo, Illinois, 1969-74**. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Proquest Dissertations Publishing, 2012. 3600721.

identity and culture consciousness, served two functions for blacks. First, the movement provided them with psychological benefits, a positive view of themselves as human beings. Second, they saw black power's emphasis on addressing the social and political needs of black communities as a guide for their evangelical Christianity to preach both soul salvation and social liberation.

***Your God is Too White*: An MBES Handbook**

As mentioned earlier in this text, the first four chapters of *Your God is too White* offers an overview of black history and Christianity from slavery to the 1960s. Salley and Behm's argument that frames their historical survey is that there is a distinction between "Christianity" and Christianity. "Christianity" represents a religion that used the bible to justify the enslavement of blacks and to perpetuate the myth that people of African descent were cursed. The religion in quotation marks also excluded blacks from white churches, and from "the benefits of American life in the name of a Christianity which blesses the status quo."[48] Salley and Behm argue that "Christianity" was effective in teaching blacks to hate themselves and to worship whiteness.

Christianity without the quotations represented a "genuine Christianity" that "affirms a positive black self-concept and actively cooperates with blacks as they struggle to liberate themselves from white oppression."[49] Salley and Behm notes that "Christianity" and Christianity developed simultaneously in U.S. history. They point to key events such as the founding of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the religious undertones of Nat Turner's slave revolt, and the theological writings of W.E.B. Du Bois and James Baldwin as critical moments in the rise of

[48] Salley and Behm, 13.
[49] Ibid., 13.

Christianity and as precursors to the spiritual possibilities that they, Salley and Behm, see in black power.

In their fifth chapter, "The Emergence of Black: The Basis for a New Religion," Salley and Behm presents black power as essential "ideological base" for the development of Christianity.[50] Salley and Behm define black power as, "the bold assertion of the fact that the humanity of blacks is a non-negotiable, indisputable, non-compromising reality. The humanity of black people *is*!"[51] The authors then explain how the rise of the study of black history has contributed to both the emergence of black pride in their humanity. Further, Salley and Behm argue that these studies counter racist claims that black people have not contributed positively to the development of the United States. They argue that by embracing black power, blacks, now fully aware of their value and worth as human beings, can create a new vision for evangelical Christianity. Salley and Behm explain:

> Black Power indicates to a black man than any experience with God, in light of one's everyday exploitation and persecution, is only real and beneficial if that God can actively empathize with him and act against those forces which seek to destroy him…In reality, God must become black. He must become the God not of the "sweet by and by" but of the bitter here and now.[52]

For Salley and Behm, the black power movement forces "Christianity" to shift from its narrow emphasis on salvation and eschatology to becoming a vehicle for helping blacks to achieve social, political, and economic equality in American institutions. Again, Salley and Behm's emphasis on Christianity's applicability to the "here and now" is essentially what connects them to the tradition of Cleage and Cone. However, in their fifth chapter, Salley and Behm maintain their evangelical worldviews by insisting that a Christian theology informed by black power

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[50] Salley and Behm, 73.
[51] Salley and Behm, 65.
[52] Ibid., 65.

cannot exclusively "reconstruct a Christ and a Christianity after an image and likeness which is black."[53] They distance themselves from "Cleage and other black theologians" who have argued that God and Christ *are* black. For Salley and Behm, God, Christ, and Christianity must *represent* blackness, but it is "unbiblical" for them to argue that God is black because, "God as revealed in the Bible is not governed by distinctions of color."[54]

In their next two chapters, Salley and Behm speak directly to blacks and whites using the bible to instruct on how these groups should respond to black power. Chapter Six, "What the Black Man Must Know About Christianity," encourages black people to not become disillusioned with Christianity because of "Christianity." Salley and Behm suggest that black people have the responsibility to read the bible independently of white, racist theologies and philosophies, to recognize that true Christianity is not predicated upon historic American racial ideologies, and to acknowledge that the bible, particularly the New Testament, teaches that all people under God are equal.[55]

The seventh and final chapter, "What the White Christian Must Do with His Church," isn't as encouraging at the sixth chapter. It functions as a final rebuke for white Christians. The earlier chapters criticized anti-slavery Protestants, Quakers, Northern industrialists, Social Gospelers, and early evangelical heroes such as D.L. Moody and Billy Sunday for perpetuating racism while promoting Christian ideals. The modern white evangelical that is addressed in Salley and Behm's final chapter is instructed to live out several New Testament teachings. They write:

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[53] Salley and Behm, 77.
[54] Salley and Behm, 86.
[55] Salley and Behm, 99-100.

> Since God commands Christians to "do good to all men," and to be "careful to apply themselves to good deeds," then we are disobedient Christians if we do not evidence social concern which issues in overt action. The Great Commission itself commands to "make disciples…teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." And the teaching of Jesus includes that the children of the Kingdom should be perfect as their heavenly Father is perfect, who does good to all men and sends sun and rain upon the evil and the good.[56]

By referencing these passages in Galatians, Titus, and Matthew, Salley and Behm insist that white Christians become "do-ers," active in struggles for justice and righteousness. The authors astutely defeat all generalized white objections to social activism with two arguments. One, Salley and Behm argue that "Christian love" is not enough to enact social change. White evangelical Christians must also support laws that create equality for blacks. Two, they refute the idea that social activism compromises "Christian faith" because it requires cooperation with "nonbelievers." Salley and Behm argue that Christians cooperate with non-Christians daily by observing traffic laws, voting, and doing other mundane actions that involve collaboration with people outside of their faith.[57]

Salley and Behm provide suggestions for how white Christians can financially support black communities. The authors suggest that evangelicals can provide financial assistance for blacks doing the work of community development, they can become educated about black history and culture and redesign the curricula of their churches to represent that history, and they can endeavor to work cooperatively with MBES who would challenge them to change their views on black humanity and leadership styles. They close the section, and the book, by stating, "To those white Christians who would ask for more concrete instruction on what to do, we

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[56] Salley and Behm,106-7.
[57] Salley and Behm, 107-108.

would reiterate Richard Wright's words, "We all, deep in our hearts, know exactly what to do, though most of us would rather die than do it."[58]

Your God is too White received mostly positive reviews from both black and white evangelicals. One notable black evangelical, William Pannell, who was still working with the TSA, praised the book as "a fine effort and a mind-blower for anyone who sincerely wants to know what kind of Christianity is needed in today's struggle for survival in racist America."[59] James LaGrand, Jr., a white Christian Reformed pastor, credited the book for teaching him about the "sin of racism."[60] Further, LaGrand praises Salley and Behm for presenting a more biblical treatment of black power than the theology offered by Cleage. Salley and Behm's emphasis on biblical authority endeared their book to both black and white evangelicals, even though white Christians found themselves chastised for "flattering themselves on their good intentions while forgetting to be prophetic."[61]

Of the available reviews, James S. Tinney's stands out as exceptionally well-written and analytical. Tinney, a white Christian, published his review, "Undressing White Christians" for *Christianity Today* in June of 1971. Tinney agrees with the basic arguments of Salley and Behm's work. However, he suggests that the authors miss the mark in their brief discussion of the root of evangelical fears over integration because they "deal with interpretation over historical fact."[62]

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[58] Salley and Behm, 114.
[59] This review is featured on the book's jacket cover.
[60] James LaGrand, *Your God is Too White Review*, *Reformed Journal 22:1* (1972): 19.
[61] LaGrand, 19-20.
[62] James Tinney, "Undressing White Christians." *Christianity Today* (*June 18, 1971*): 27.

Salley and Behm's seventh chapter briefly rebukes white evangelicals for supporting segregation over fear of interracial sex. Tinney does not offer an example to prove Salley and Behm wrong here, but the authors were correct in their assessment on how sexuality informed concerns about integration.[63] Tinney, who was teaching black studies at the high school level at the time of his review, should have at least had some awareness of miscegenation laws and their role in maintaining segregation. The 1967 Supreme Court case, *Loving v. Virginia* was decided just three years before Salley and Behm's work was published. And, while they do not reference the case in their work, Salley and Behm would have known from personal experience how fears over interracial relationships could inform racist thought considering Behm's marriage to a black woman.

Salley and Behm revisited *Your God is too White* several times throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. An illustrated version of the text was published in 1973. In 1981, the book was re-released and re-titled as, *What Color is Your God: Black Consciousness and the Christian Faith*. A booklet titled, *Blacks and the White Jesus*, was also published in 1981 to condense the teachings found in both the 1970 and 1981 versions. The only differences between the versions is that the 1981 re-issue includes a "Foreword" by Congressman Walter Fauntroy, detailed footnoting, a bibliography, and index.[64] I note the book's publication endurance because it speaks to how influential the text was for MBES.

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[63] There are a host of historical studies on how sexual concerns informed thinking about integration. For example, Danielle McGuire (2010), Morris Davis (2008), Lisa Cardyn (2002) all examine how white male fears that integration would lead to interracial marriage influenced how they organized themselves and their institutions to maintain segregation.

[64] The reissue and the booklet were also published by InterVarsity. The original book included a Foreword by Ed Riddick, a black pastor from Denver who was active in Jesse Jackson's Operation: PUSH, an organization designed to address hunger. The inclusion of a Foreword by Fauntroy in the revised version is a signal that the publishers were attempting to reach a broader civil rights audience, considering Fauntroy's activism in King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Ronald C. Potter, who dubbed *Your God is Too White* as "the handbook for black militant evangelicals," suggests that its greatest impact was felt by those young black, militant individuals who were active in the NNEA in 1969-1976.[65] It was these group of individuals who steered the organization into fully embracing the black power movement. Two of those individuals who followed Salley's lead in writing about black power and evangelical Christianity was the Rev. William H. Bentley and Clarence Hilliard.

Towards Christianity in the face of "Christianity": Bentley and Hilliard

William Bentley and Clarence Hilliard stand out because their respective engagements with black power are telling about the implications of trying to create Christianity in a nation where "Christianity" remained, and remains, virtually intact. An objective assessment of the writings of Bentley and Hilliard has led me to conclude that there is not much differentiation between their thought and the thought of Skinner, Pannell, and Salley and Behm. However, one difference that I see more clearly in Bentley's writings is an attempt to provide an evangelical alternative for blacks who were considering black theology. Further, in Hilliard's written work, there is an attempt to educate white evangelicals on the language of black power, and a pitch for social activism and racial harmony. However, his attempt to encourage his interracial congregation to embrace social justice cost him his pastoral position.

William H. Bentley, a native of Chicago, was a charter member of the NNEA in 1963. In 1970, he became the association's second president. During his six-year tenure, the group became known as, the National Black Evangelical Association (hereafter, NBEA). In addition to leading the NBEA, Bentley was concurrently working as a community relations consultant for

[65] See Potter's essay, "The New Black Evangelicals" in *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979* edited by Gayraud Wilmore and James Cone. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1979), 305-308.

the city of Chicago, pastoring Calvary Baptist Church, and teaching systematic theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Bentley, a Pentecostal, was the first black student to receive a bachelor's of divinity at Fuller Theological Seminary.[66]

Bentley was prolific writer in the late sixties through the beginning of the eighties, and there are two brief pieces that I want to highlight here. First, his 1976 article, "Black Christian Nationalism: An Evangelical Perspective," stands out because it shows that much of the MBES project in the 1970s was simply directed towards providing an evangelical response to black theologians who maintained a liberal view of biblical authority. Bentley is responding to Albert Cleage's second book, *Black Christian Nationalism: New Directions for the Black Church*, which was published in 1972.

As mentioned above, Cleage founded Black Christian Nationalism, as an all-black denomination based upon his teachings in *The Black Messiah*. Bentley responds to Cleage's call for spiritual and social liberation for blacks by positioning the NBEA as the evangelical alternative to Cleage's denomination. Bentley explains, "Black Christian Nationalism, evangelical variety, accepts the concept and necessity of a Black agenda, and it comes to the discussion table, not with hat in hand, but as a potential contributing participant."[67] He goes on to provide examples of how the NBEA is directly addressing the social and political concerns of black churches, black students matriculating at predominately white schools, and community development. However, he stresses throughout that the NBEA's version of Black Christian

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[66] A.G. Miller has noted the significance of Bentley's education. Black Pentecostal preachers did not traditionally seek seminary training, as they believed that the bible and the Holy Spirit were the primary sources for their preaching. See A. G. Miller's chapter, "The Rise of African American Evangelicalism in American Culture" in *Perspectives on American Religion and Culture* ed. Peter Williams (Malden: Blackwell Publishers), 259-269.
[67] William Bentley, "Black Christian Nationalism: An Evangelical Perspective" in *Black Books Bulletin 4:1* (Spring 1976): 30.

Nationalism is "identical with the concept of "Bible believing.""[68] In short, Bentley is arguing against any version of Christianity that "uncritically glorified" black identity in expressing a theological posture towards black liberation.[69]

Bentley revisits his conversation on black theologians in his history of the NBEA from 1963 to 1979. The book, *The National Black Evangelical Association: Reflections on the Evolution of a Concept of Ministry*, includes a brief chapter examining the contributions of James Cone and several liberal black theologians. Bentley essentially maintains the same critique of Cone that he made of Cleage's work referenced above. However, Bentley points to the work of Tom Skinner, Columbus Salley, and William Pannell as key architects of a black evangelical theology that should be considered alongside the work of Cone and other writers in black theology.

While Bentley's overall writing project was basically the evangelical perspective to black theology in the black power era, his leadership of the NBEA is the most enduring example of how influential the black power movement was in shaping black evangelical identity in the seventies. Bentley, though initially unprepared for the militant uprisings led by Salley at the association's conventions in 1969 and 1970, took Salley's call seriously. Bentley helped to nurture a sense of black pride in the association, and he oversaw its development as an activist organization while maintaining an evangelical Christian worldview. He has been honored as "the godfather of black militant evangelicals," and as "the father of the NBEA."[70]

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[68] Bentley, "Black Christian Nationalism: An Evangelical Perspective," 29.
[69] Bentley, 30.
[70] See Potter's essay, "The New Black Evangelicals" in *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979* edited by Gayraud Wilmore and James Cone. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1979): 305. Also, the NBEA's current president, William McCray, continues to maintain the NBEA as a caretaker of black evangelical thought. His recent article, "Certified Black Evangelicals: We are Evangelical and Political, But We are Not Whitenized" on the organization's website is one example of both Bentley's influence and his honorific title, "father." See, http://www.the-

Further, Bentley shaped the NBEA as an intellectual and spiritual support community for a host of black evangelicals. At the end of his article in response to Albert Cleage, Bentley details one of the NBEA's conferences that was entirely, "Black financed and restricted to Black participation—something a large number of Black people still find hard to swallow."[71] While Bentley's comments may be read as "separatist" in nature, I think that his greater point was that he was proud that black evangelicals were able to conduct ministry events in their own communities independent of the censorship that would have come with white financial sponsorship. I believe this to be true of Bentley's thinking for two reasons. First, Bentley's history of the NBEA confirms that even though many whites, and some blacks, left the organization after the association became increasingly militant, many whites remained active and engaged.[72] Second, Bentley would have been familiar with the limits of white support of black ideologies through the events that publicly unfolded in the career of his close associate, Clarence Hilliard. Therefore, William Bentley was able to foster in the NBEA a sense of economic independence and a sense of self-determination, two concepts that were consistent with black power ideology.

Clarence Hilliard was born and raised in Buffalo, New York. He was a graduate of Houghton College and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Chicago, where he and his family settled in 1969. A year later, he joined the staff of Circle Church, where he hoped he could

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nbea.org/home-3/certified-black-evangelicals/. Bentley died at the age of 69 in 1993. His obituary can be found here: http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1993-05-22/news/9305220099_1_black-church-theology-fuller-theological-seminary. The piece is titled, "Pentecostals' Rev. William Bentley." It is written by Kenan Heise and was published on May 22, 1993.

[71] Bentley, 31.

[72] Bentley notes that he did not want to run the risk of excluding individuals, but he noted that John and Fred Alexander of *The Other Side* magazine and Rufus Jones of the Conservative Baptist Home Missions Department remained faith members of the NBEA. Bentley, The National Black Evangelical Association," 104-105.

promote social justice and racial harmony in an evangelical community. Nearly six years later, Hilliard's dream was over.

In the "News" section of *Christianity Today* from May 7, 1976 a small report reads:

> A well-publicized evangelical experiment in inter-racial urban ministry came apart recently. As a result of policy differences and intra-staff tensions, black evangelical leader Clarence Hilliard was asked to leave by the pastoral staff of Circle Church, an Evangelical Free Church of America congregation in Chicago. He had served about six years. Most of the forty or so blacks in the congregation of 400 left with him to help organize another church.[73]

Four months earlier, Hilliard's essay, "Down with the Honky Christ-Up with the Funky Jesus," was featured in the same magazine.[74] Essentially, the contents of the article sum up why Hilliard was asked to leave his church. Hilliard repeats an argument found in the Dan Orme that Columbus Salley was featured in and that is found in Salley and Behm's book: evangelical Christianity must "de-honkyfy" in order to become more socially relevant. Hilliard adds that Jesus modeled "dehonkyfying" by "moving to the bottom of the social order" to serve, and to die on the cross, "a death reserved for the niggers of his day" for all of humanity.[75] For Hilliard, Jesus Christ was a "symbol of blackness" who did not simply preach salvation, but also responded to the needs of the "disinherited."[76] Ultimately, Hilliard concluded that Jesus was "funky," or a model of liberation, authenticity, and creativity who modeled how evangelical social action should be executed. He challenged white Christians to follow the example of the "funky" Jesus, and join black Christians in the struggle for justice.

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[73] The blurb was featured on page 51 of *Christianity Today* published on May 7, 1976.
[74] Clarence Hilliard, "Down with the Honky Christ-Up with the Funky Jesus." *Christianity Today* Jan 30, 1976.
[75] Hilliard, 6.
[76] Hilliard 7. Hilliard's use of the term, "disinherited" is shows that he may have been referencing Howard Thurman's 1949 book, *Jesus and the Disinherited*. Thurman's influential book was the first of the postwar era to compare the historical Jesus's social condition to the experiences of blacks under segregation.

Hilliard's essay was originally intended to be preached as a sermon at Circle Church in November of 1975. However, he was not permitted to deliver the message because the subject matter offended the white leaders he co-pastored with.[77] Hilliard had been at odds with his white co-pastors for nearly the entire duration of his tenure there. Soong-Chan Rah and Gary Vanderpol's study of Circle Church explains that Hilliard's primary role in the church was to "keep black people from leaving."[78] Black congregants continually expressed concern over the lack of a black presence on the worship team, unfair treatment of black children in Sunday School, the superior attitude of whites, and the consistent censorship of Hilliard as a leader in the church.[79]

Reading Rah and Vanderpol's examination of Clarence Hilliard's time at Circle Church adds much more texture to the *Christianity Today* news blurb on his departure. The matter had more to do with the white leadership's unwillingness to accept the perspective of Hilliard, and to respect the spiritual and cultural concerns of the black congregants they so desperately wanted in their community. Essentially, Circle Church wanted blacks as members in their fellowship as proof that they were socially progressive, but they refused to progress pass their own racism. Instead of taking responsibility for their oppressive attitudes and actions, the white leadership expelled Hilliard rather than allowing themselves to be challenged by his thinking.

After Clarence Hilliard was ejected from Circle Church in 1976, he founded Austin Corinthian Baptist Church where he served until his death in 2005. Hilliard maintained a commitment to interracial ministry by connecting his church with white congregations

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[77] See *Return to Justice: Six Movements That Reignited Our Contemporary Evangelical Conscience* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016) by Soong-Chan Rah and Gary Vanderpol.
[78] Rah and Vanderpol, 133.
[79] Ibid., 133.

throughout Chicago, throughout the U.S., and around the globe through seminars, workshop, and joint services.[80]

MBES: Their Legacies on Evangelical Christianity in the Black Power Era

Columbus Salley, William Bentley, and Clarence Hilliard all agreed with James Cone: black power positively affirmed the humanity of black people, and the movement created a possibility for Christians, both blacks and whites, to model Jesus of Nazareth by empowering and uplifting the poor and the powerless. They believed that social liberation and soul salvation worked simultaneously, not separately. Of course, MBES differed with Cone on the role of biblical authority in their analysis of black power. Their belief in the bible, particularly in the New Testament, cautioned them against assigning Christ a racial classification. Instead, they presented him as symbolically black, capable of understanding the plight of black people in the U.S. I think that MBES also shared Cone's ideas about racial reconciliation. Cone argued that reconciliation could only happen in Christian community when the oppressed—black people—defined the terms of reconciliation.

The writings reviewed above show that MBES truly wanted to engage with white Christians with clear, honest, and direct confrontation of prejudices and biases. This is reflected clearly in Salley and Behm's partnership. Their commitment to revising their work over the course of eleven years demonstrate that they developed an open communication style with respect to race and evangelical Christianity. Their partnership was ended in 1985 when Behm,

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[80] See, Patrick Rucker, "Rev. Clarence Hilliard, 76." *Chicago Tribune*. February 3, 2005. http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2005-02-03/news/0502030379_1_racial-harmony-modern-church-racial-reconciliation.

his wife, and young son were brutally murdered by Herschel Jackson. Jackson, one of the people to whom *Your God is too White* is dedicated, was Behm's step-son.[81]

Though the NBEA increasingly embraced black power in its organizational structure, blacks in the association continued to welcome and work with whites. The historical records suggest that whites left on their own accord. To be fair, whites probably were offended by the militant tone of MBES. But, their exodus only served to prove the point of MBES: white evangelicals were only engaged with blacks when it is comfortable for them to do so. White evangelicals, as the example of the NBEA and Clarence Hilliard's experience with Circle Church demonstrates, were not comfortable with being constantly confronted with their racism as often as blacks were constantly reminded of their inferior status in evangelical churches and American cities.

Ultimately, the legacy of MBES is that they utilized black power to redefine themselves as black men, and they created new theological, specifically, Christological works that redefined Christianity to address the problem of race in a manner that emphasized full equality for themselves, their communities, and for white evangelicals. Further, they attempted interracial harmony with white evangelicals. But, MBES refused to acquiesce to white supremacy. They realized that authentic racial reconciliation meant that white evangelicals had to become black—symbolically and spiritually. However, most white evangelicals refused to regard MBES, their "brothers in Christ," as equals. Rather than accept the militant critique of MBES, some white

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[81] See Note 29 on Behm's murder. Also, Behm wrote one piece independently of Salley. "The Black Side of Christianity" was featured in an essay collection, *Christianity for the Tough-Minded*, in 1973. By the time of Behm's death, Columbus Salley was in litigation with the Newark Board of Education. Salley received a sizable settlement to submit his resignation and discontinue legal action against the board for defamation of character. The New York Times report is the last published historical record on his career. It is found here: http://www.nytimes.com/1985/11/03/nyregion/newark-schools-chief-gets-660000-settlement.html. Besides Pannell, Salley is the only other MBES who is alive at the time of this writing.

evangelicals formed alliances with black evangelicals with a more mild, moderate approach to race. As stated above, I have defined these black evangelicals as, assimilationist black evangelicals, or ABES.

The Success of John Perkins?

Again, John Perkins is singled out here for review as the only ABES for three reasons. One, I included Perkins here for a more thorough examination over Howard O. Jones and E.V. Hill because of Perkins's engagement with black power ideologies that shaped his approach to doing ministry. Both Jones and Hill addressed the subject of race in evangelical Christianity in their respective writings and speeches, and for a time, Hill was active in civil rights organizing.[82] However, they simply did not engage with black power. Two, William Pannell's quote from the opening of this chapter encouraged me to think more critically about why white evangelicals have held John Perkins in such esteem, and continue to work with him on race and faith. Pannell's suggestion that he and Skinner opened the door for John Perkins is something that I wanted to wrestle with as I engaged the scholarship and writing about Perkins. There is an overwhelming concern with establishing his success in racial reconciliation ministry, yet there has been very little discussion on how race plays a role in Perkins's success. Three, as stated above, John Perkins remains active and influential in evangelical Christian circles as of 2018. White evangelicals still look to him for his thoughts on race, racism, and racial reconciliation.

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[82] Howard O. Jones published books on race and evangelical Christianity in 1968 and 1975. However, his identity as the first black evangelist to serve on Billy Graham's preaching time prohibited him from addressing race as radically as MBES. See, Edward Gilbreath, "The Jackie Robinson of Evangelism," *Christianity Today*, February 9, 1998, for more information on Jones. E.V. Hill's transition from a co-worker in Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Conference to a staunch supporter of the evangelical right is documented in Christian Reed, "The Rev. E. V. Hill," *The Guardian*, April 9, 2003. https://www.theguardian.com/news/2003/apr/10/guardianobituaries.usa.

John Perkins was born in 1930 to a family of sharecroppers and bootleggers in New Hebron, Mississippi. He exited school after the third grade to work and assist his family until a tragic event redirected the course of his life. At the age of sixteen, John Perkins watched his older brother die two days after being shot by a police officer for not observing the town's curfew for black citizens. Clyde, who had just returned home from serving in WWII, was Perkins's father figure. His family believed that if Perkins remained in the Deep South, he could face his brother's fate, so they sent him to California to live with relatives.

Perkins's time in California was marked by religious experimentation. However, he became an evangelical Christian after his teenaged son invited him to church. Perkins felt called to return to Mississippi with his wife, Vera, and their nine children to preach the gospel, and to help develop his poverty-stricken hometown in 1960.

Perkins hesitantly became involved with civil rights activism in the state of Mississippi. On the one hand, he felt that as an evangelical Christian, his primary activism was to teach and preach the gospel before the return of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, his work in community development led him to understand that he needed to advocate for voting rights, better education, and quality housing to preach, "the whole gospel," to black people in Mississippi.[83] So, in addition to founding Voice of Calvary Bible Institute (VOC) as a training ground for spiritual instruction, Perkins attended to the practical concerns of his community by expanding the institute to include a healthcare clinic, a preschool, and a construction company.

In many respects, the VOC, which was founded in 1964, serves an example of how deeply Perkins was influenced by the black separatist organization, the Nation of Islam (NOI). It

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[83] Perkins describes his "whole gospel" approach in Chapter 13 of his memoir, *Let Justice Roll Down*.

is impossible to talk about the black power era without some consideration of the NOI. In summary, NOI was conceived as a "nation within a nation," Elijah Muhammad and his student, Malcolm X, shaped the NOI into the only solution for black people in the U.S. in the fifties and sixties. Further, Malcolm was a spiritual and intellectual mentor to Stokely Carmichael, Huey Newton, and other prominent individuals associated with the black power movement.[84] The NOI proposed that their faith affirmed the humanity of blacks, preached that white people were devils, and they argued that blacks could not rely on the American government, medicine, businesses, and educational institutions to attend to their needs appropriately. So, the NOI created their own institutions in Harlem, Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland, a host of other cities with large black populations, and they largely operated these institutions with very little white influence.[85]

During his years of religious experimentation, Perkins considered joining the NOI, but he offers no reason why he did not convert to Islam. He only mentions that their "strict devotion and discipline" appealed to him.[86] However, the NOI's practice of merging their mosques with healthcare services, educational training for children and adults, and black-owned businesses also influenced Perkins.[87] In describing the work of VOC to a *Christianity Today* interviewer in 1976, Perkins says, "We are using a Black Muslim approach to reaching people. The difference is the centrality of the Cross in our ministry."[88] The other differences is that the half of the VOC's team was comprised of white men and women, and much of the VOC's work was funded

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[84] Peniel Joseph (2006, 2010) detail the influence on Malcolm on black power leaders.

[85] *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* is quite possibly the best primary source on the NOI. While Malcolm does not talk about white involvement in the NOI, I imagine that they would have had to pay taxes to the IRS, and purchase properties from white landowners.

[86] Perkins, *Let Justice Roll Down: John Perkins Tells His Own Story* (Ventura: Regal Press),67.

[87] Again, Malcolm X's autobiography explains the services that the NOI provided to their members and the black communities their chapters were located in.

[88] Perkins, "The Mendenhall Model Answers the Black Muslims," *Christianity Today* January 30, 1976, 13.

and supported by networks of white evangelicals in Southern California.[89] In this manner, VOC is totally distinct from the NOI in that it was an interracial enterprise that made John Perkins an icon of racial reconciliation ministry. In short, Perkins preached empowerment and self-development to blacks, and charity to white, wealthy evangelicals to help support his ministry blacks in their efforts.[90]

John Perkins never expressed any support for the black power movement, even though he was clearly influenced by the NOI. In fact, he is argued that his ministry is "stronger than race."[91] However, like William Bentley did with the NBEA and Albert Cleage's denomination, Perkins provided an evangelical alternative to the NOI's concept of black self-determination and economic develop in black communities with the VOC. Like the NOI, he developed a system for attending to both the spiritual and social needs of black communities. As Perkins became more involved in ministry and social action in Mississippi, his civil rights activism increased. In February of 1970, Perkins was arrested and brutally beaten shortly after drafting and publishing a document titled, "Demands of the Black Community."[92] The document recommended fifteen prescriptions for a new direction for race relations in the city of Mendenhall. Perkins describes his ordeal at length in his popular autobiography, *Let Justice Roll Down: John Perkins Tells His Own Story*.

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[89] Peter Slade's essay, "A Quiet Revolution and the Culture Wars" in *Mobilizing for the Common Good: The Lived Theology of John M. Perkins edited by Peter Slade, Charles Marsh, and Peter Godwin Heltzel*, is one example out of many that discusses how Perkins connects with white evangelicals and encourages them to "redistribute their resources to the poor and excluded," 69.

[90] I am intentionally using the word, "charity" in this text even though Perkins's noted that the foundation of his ministry is built on "The Three Rs:" Relocation, Reconciliation, and Redistribution. See Sider, Foreword, VII. While I have read about the theory behind Perkins's model of ministry, what is actually taking place in his ministries is "charity" and not the "redistribution" of white wealth to poor blacks.

[91] Tim Stafford, "Grandpa John: A New Generation of Urban Activists is Shaped by John Perkins." *Christianity Today March 9, 2007*, 50.

[92] A copy of the document in located in the Appendix of Perkins's book, *A Quiet Revolution: The Christian Response to Human Need…A Strategy for Today* (Waco: Word Publisher, 1976), 225-226.

John Perkins's autobiography was originally published in 1976. What stands out about his account is that he responds to his savage beating with the heart of an evangelical Christian, someone who believed that being conversionism or that being "born again," and the bible could solve racism in the U.S. After fleshing out the details of his six-month recovery, a period during which he rigorously read New Testament scripture on forgiveness and love, Perkins states:

> The Spirit of God helped me to really believe what I had so often professed, that only in the love of Christ is there any hope for me, or for those I had once worked so hard for. After that, God gave me the strength and motivation to rise up out of my bed and return to Mendenhall and spread a little more of His love around. Oh, I know man is bad—depraved. There's something built into him that makes him want to be superior. If the black man had the advantage, he'd be just as a bad, just as bad. So I can't hate the white man. The problem is spiritual: black or white, we all need to be born again. It's a profound, mysterious truth—Jesus' concept of love overpowering hate. I may not see its victory in my lifetime. But I know its true. I know it's true because it happened to me. He washed away my hatred and replaced it with a love for the white man in rural Mississippi. I felt strong again. Stronger than ever. What doesn't destroy me makes me stronger. I know it's true. Because it happened to me.[93]

This passage sums up why I believe John Perkins has experienced a great deal of "success" in ministry for the last fifty years. Perkins's blind obedience to the scriptures, and his emphasize on spiritualizing racism, connecting it to sin and salvation over societal structure, is essentially the predominate, white evangelical view. While Perkins has been able to base his ministry on both preaching the gospel, and providing community development, his theological worldview somehow cannot fathom that being "born again" is not enough to rid the U.S. of the problem of racism.

Perkins's emphasis on loving white people, specifically the white people who savagely beat him, is also one of the reasons I think he has found "success" in racial reconciliation ministry. Perkins once said of himself, "I am called to preach the good news of Jesus Christ to

[93] Perkins, *Let Justice Roll Down*, 206.

white people."[94] Ultimately, John Perkins expresses the kind of love that white evangelicals desired, and required, from black evangelicals. William Pannell's memoir, *My Friend, The Enemy*, examined in Chapter 2, reflects that this assertion is true. Pannell challenged the role of love in evangelical thought by explaining:

> If I am hungry and naked, jobless because the educational establishment is more dedicated to tradition than to people, don't offer me a changed heart. That's not where the problem is. Don't preach love to me. Especially if you intend I do all the loving. Amazing how white people who have owned black people have a way of demanding that we love everybody. What right has the oppressor to demand that his victim be saved from sin? You may be scripturally and evangelistically correct, but you are ethically wrong.[95]

Perkins does not offer a similar critique to his oppressors in his autobiography, or in *A Quiet Revolution*, another work published in 1976, that provides a history of VOC. To use the words of Pannell and Skinner's critics, as featured in the opening Pannell quote at the start of this chapter, Perkins has managed to "preach the simple gospel," or offer "conversion" and God's love as the only hope for ending racism. Therein lies his "success."

Since 2000, scholars and writers have been addressing the subject of John Perkins's success in racial reconciliation ministry. Sociologists Michael Emerson and Christian Smith, the first two writers to unpack this issue, concluded in their influential study, *Divided by Faith*, that Perkins, Tom Skinner, and Samuel Hines, "three founding fathers," have failed at generating a movement of racial reconciliation that reached beyond the preaching of "individual reconciliation."[96] Emerson and Smith explain that racial reconciliation ministries have only focused on building deep relationships based on love and forgiveness between individual blacks

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[94] Charles Marsh and John Perkins, *Welcoming Justice: God's Movement toward Beloved Community* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 37.
[95] Pannell, *My Friend, The Enemy*, 64.
[96] Michael Emerson and Christian Smith, Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in American (New York: Oxford University, 2000), 67.

and whites, but have failed to defeat institutional racism. The authors are not wrong here in describing the failure of these ministries. But, I take issue with their notion that Perkins, Skinner, and Hines failed in their efforts considering the conclusion to *Divided by Faith*.

Emerson and Smith conclude that white evangelicals were responsible for reproducing the cultural dominance of whiteness in their religious institutions. Therefore, it is rather presumptuous to argue that black men failed at developing a successful interracial movement within evangelical Christianity when the problem was not in their efforts. The failure was that white supremacy prevailed over their hard work to enact racial harmony. Cheryl J. Sanders also takes issue with Emerson and Smith's conclusion.

In 2009, Sanders gave a public address titled, "Prophetic Ministry, the Prosperity Gospel, and Gentrification" at the University of Virginia, as part of the Institute for Lived Theology. Sanders points out that, at the time of Emerson and Smith's publication, both Skinner and Hines died at relatively young ages in 1994 and 1995, respectively. As a result, Sanders credits the longevity of Perkins's life as one of the reasons he was still "thriving" in reconciliation ministry one year after the election of Barack Obama. Sanders offers three more reasons. One, she argues that Perkins implements the "Word of God" in his ministry organization, the Christian Community Development Association. Two, he critiqued the prosperity gospel messages of black and white evangelicals for not being "purposeful" in reinvesting wealth in poor communities. Finally, Sanders says that Perkins successfully challenged churches to remain in crime-ridden communities and offer support as "good neighbors."[97]

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[97] See Cheryl J. Sanders, "Prophetic Ministry, the Prosperity Gospel, and Gentrification," in Mobilizing for the Common Good: The Lived Theology of John M. Perkins, 134-136.

Sanders, a pastor and professor of Christian Ethics, is not necessarily wrong in her assessment of Perkins's ministry. I consider the context in which she gave her analysis of Perkins, and I realize that it may be futile to criticize her speech for failing to address how race has played a role in Perkins's so-called success. However, she makes an interesting point about Ronald Reagan. On the one hand, Sanders finds it baffling how, "President Reagan gets to be the hero of evangelical Christians." On the other, Sanders believes that Reagan's policies, which "turned people out of mental institutions and into the streets," gave her ministry a boost because, "there were more people to feed."[98] Sanders does not offer any reasons to explain her bewilderment over Reagan's role as an evangelical hero, and it is beyond the scope of my own study to fully unpack Reagan's complicated relationship with evangelical Christianity.[99] However, Sanders's praise of Reagan—his policies presented opportunities for her church's community service—is also baffling.[100] At the same time, Sanders's Reagan example demonstrates my point about Perkins and his "success." Rather than providing examples of how she and her church worked to change Reagan's policies, she offers a sanctimonious rationale for how her church was able to provide service for the poor and homeless. Again, that is the problem with John Perkins's long career in racial reconciliation ministry. For over fifty years, Perkins has been preaching and practicing a message of forgiveness and Christian charity that successfully encourages individuals to serve the poor, but his message and his activism falls short of

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[98] Sanders, 131.

[99] Darren Dochuk (2012), Daniel K. Williams (2012), Stephen P. Miller (2014) all discuss the rise of Ronald Reagan and his relationship with the religious right. In short, Reagan, though he was not an active church member, spoke the language of the Moral Majority to secure votes for his campaign in 1979-80. For example, Reagan spoke about "prayer," "traditional family values," etc., and promised the group that his administration would include a sizeable evangelical presence. However, Reagan made very few evangelical appointments to his cabinet, and he appointed Sandra Day O'Connor, a pro-life jurist to the Supreme Court, which caused tensions with large evangelical base. Sanders could have been referring to one of these examples in expressing her bewilderment over Reagan's role as an evangelical hero.

[100] I personally think that success in ministry should not be based on how horrible the government policies are.

addressing the systemic issues that continually create the need for their service, like homelessness and hunger.

Kenneth Young addresses John Perkins's ministry from another perspective. Where Sanders gives a brief overview of Perkins's implementation of "prophetic social witness," Young considers Perkins's place in the history of black theology in his book, *The Trouble with Racial Reconciliation: Why John Perkins' Theological Approach Works.* Young, a professor of Systematic Theology and a pastor in the Evangelical Free Church of America, places Perkins in conversation with James Cone, Gayraud Wilmore, and J. Deotis Roberts. Young argues that unlike those other writers in black theology, Perkins has been successful from a theological standpoint because he emphasizes "identity in Christ" as the primary identity in his theology over "racialization."[101] Racialization, Young explains, "is a worldview that, in spite of biological evidence to the contrary, organizes humans into racial groupings purportedly based on biology—rendering some racial groups inferior to others."[102] Because Perkins does not ascribe to racialization, his theological approach has served to better critique racism and work towards reconciliation in the "evangelical church."[103]

Young's choice of subjects demonstrates a basic misunderstanding of the men he included in his work. Of course, a figure like Cone would not offer a successful, working theology for the "evangelical church" with respect to racial reconciliation because he maintained very different views on biblical authority than evangelicals. Further, Young is biased towards the views of white evangelicals. Young's position as a black man affiliated with the Evangelical

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[101] Kenneth N. Young, *The Trouble with Racial Reconciliation: Why John Perkins' Theological Approach Works*. (Minneapolis: NextStep Resources, 2012), 1.
[102] Young, i.
[103] Ibid., i.

Free Church of America makes him more appreciative of John Perkins's theology than the theological work of James Cone.[104] His bias precludes him from offering any concrete consideration of how white supremacy is stronger than sanctification in the U.S. Young, based on his engagement with Perkins, believes that "spiritual growth and biblical authority" can overcome racialization, but he fails to consider why the "sin of racism" since the inception of the United States. Ultimately, both Young and Perkins's theological worldview with its emphasis on "oneness in Christ" without attention to the reality of race in America, perpetuates a spiritual dream that is a living nightmare for people who are constantly faced with racist policies.[105]

Other scholars and writers have narrowed in on John Perkins's affable personality as an essential feature of his "success" in ministry. Most any study on a great leader would be incomplete without some attention to the subject's personality traits, habits, and other human qualities. However, when it comes to writing about John Perkins's personality in academic works, biographies, and Christian magazines, descriptions of John Perkins seem to overemphasize how likeable white conservatives who have funded his ministries find him.

Ronald J. Sider, an esteemed professor and founder of Evangelicals for Social Action, wrote the *Foreword to Mobilizing for the Common Good: The Lived Theology of John M. Perkins.* The brief excerpt from the third quote at the beginning of this chapter provides one example of how Perkins's personality has been discussed. Several times throughout the brief

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[104] As of August of 2018, the website for the Evangelical Free Church of America states that it is looking to "plant over 40 churches led by African Americans." See https://www.efca.org/ministries/reachnational/african-american-ministries. Accessed August 4, 2018. The site does not provide an indication of how many African Americans are currently affiliated with the church and its ministries. However, it is fair to assume that Kenneth Young is working as one of a few black pastors in a predominately-white evangelical organization. This leads me to conclude from my reading of his work and what biographical details I can confirm about him that he is biased towards the racial politics of white evangelicals.

[105] Of course, we can substitute the word, "racist" for "homophobic," "Islamophobic," or any other identity-oriented word that defines a human being who is not white, male, straight, wealthy, and (appears to be) Christian.

piece, Sider praises Perkins's "warm smile and friendly embrace," as a tool to "persuade wealthy (conservative!) white Americans to part with some of their wealth to empower poor African Americans."[106] Sider lists other reasons for Perkins's success, many of them are the same that are acknowledged by Cheryl Sanders, but that Sider describes Perkins as "warm" three additional times gives his piece a patronizing tone. The essay reads as if Sider wants to make it clear to his fellow white evangelicals that Perkins is a nice and friendly black man who will not challenge their politics, while taking their money.

Stephen E. Berk, Perkins's biographer, has explained, "John Perkins has a warm, childlike enthusiasm for life."[107] Further, *Christianity Today* crowned him as, "Grandpa John" in a profile piece about his engagement with youth in the twenty-first century.[108] To be fair, Tim Stafford, the author of the magazine article notes that Perkins and his wife, are called, "Grandpa and Grandma" by many young people in their organization. However, considering the evangelical magazine's wide reach in the evangelical community, I think that Stafford, like Berk, and Sider have presented John Perkins as non-threatening and safe black man that white evangelicals can comfortably engage with respect to race, racism, and evangelical Christianity. After all, as Sider's piece suggests, Perkins is not necessarily asking whites to change white supremacy, he is asking for charity, or as Sider puts it, "economic redistribution."[109]

The Costs of Blackness

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[106] Sider, Foreword, ix.

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[108] Stephen E. Berk is the author of, A Time to Heal: John Perkins, Community Development, and Racial Reconciliation (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997). This comment on Perkins came from an article titled, "From Proclamation to Community: The Work of John Perkins" in the journal, Transformation 6:4 (1989): 3. The Christianity Today article is cited in Note 88. The page is 50.

[109] Sider, Foreword, IX.

At the beginning of this chapter, I quote William Pannell, who explained that men like John Perkins, or other ABES, were sought out to be "house darkie[s] for years to come" after white evangelicals became offended by MBES. I do not believe that Pannell was personally calling Perkins a racial epithet. Moreover, my goal has not been to present Perkins in this manner. Nevertheless, I think Pannell used it to suggest that that is how white evangelicals once viewed MBES. White evangelicals wanted to be socially relevant. As the U.S. became an increasingly integrated society, white evangelicals increasingly invited blacks to join their ministries and organizations. However, they did not anticipate men like Tom Skinner and William Pannell, who would not be content with simply being in the room. Skinner, Pannell, and other MBES joined these ministries to address how to upend racism in evangelical Christian ministries. When white evangelicals refused to hear them in meeting rooms, MBES wrote articles and books, and created radio shows, to address their concerns on race, racism, and evangelical Christians. In response, white evangelicals expelled MBES from their ranks and sought out black evangelicals who approach the topic of racism moderately. Those men, as John Perkins's lengthy career shows, remained within the ranks of white evangelical ministries because they accommodated the white supremacist views of white evangelical Christians. As of 2018, white evangelicals are still consulting John Perkins for his insights on racial reconciliation.[110] His message of love, conversion, and biblical authority remains the same.

This chapter has demonstrated that challenges to white supremacy in evangelical Christianity came with certain prices for black evangelicals. MBES expressed black pride and demanded authentic equality between blacks and whites Christians. Those demands cost MBES

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[110] See for example, Duke Kwon, "John Perkins Has Hope for Racial Reconciliation. Do We?" Christianity Today, April 5, 2018. https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/april-web-only/john-perkins-one-blood-duke-kwon.html.

an opportunity to create a Christianity free from superiority and privilege. However, they paid for ABES's seat at the table of evangelical white supremacy, allowing white evangelicals to interact and consume blackness on their terms.

John Perkins and his writings from the black power era are more well-known than of the MBES reviewed here because he preached and wrote about his love for whites. He did not challenge their hypocrisy and privilege. He appealed to their sense of charity, and he did not challenge their sense of superiority. That is essentially how white evangelicals prefer to consume blackness: allow them to be charitable and comfortable, not challenged. This was true for John Perkins, and considering his profitable and productive career as an author, it remains true.[111] The same proved true for Melvin Banks and Eldridge Cleaver, two black evangelical entrepreneurs who learned two very different lessons about evangelical financial support and sponsorship. Chapter 4 examines their respective businesses.

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[111] John Perkins is the author and co-author of over 15 books.

CHAPTER 4

The Problem of Black Evangelical Brands

"One of the great deficits that I discerned among African American youth was a lack of self-esteem, a lack of appreciation for who they are. They appreciated opening a book and seeing people looking like them. While we were teaching the Bible, we were also affirming them as human beings and affirming them in accepting themselves as they were. This proved effective in helping a whole generation of young people learn who they were in Christ and accept Jesus Christ as their Savior. We also recognized that many of our young people lacked knowledge and an appreciation of our history. So, we prioritized profiles of inventors, doctors, and lawyers in our materials. We lifted the horizons of many of our young people, so they can realize that they can achieve just as much as other people."[1]

-Melvin Banks, 2017

"Those close to [Eldridge] Cleaver say he probably was exploited, but he has done some exploiting of his own. They maintain a high respect for his intelligence and believe his Christian conversion was genuine. But they say he never matured spiritually because he rejected opportunities to become grounded in the faith…Will the former radical ever be the kind of person evangelicals hoped he would be?"[2]

-Randy Frame, 1984

John Perkins, Code-Switching, and Jay-Z

The previous chapter concluded with the argument that John Perkins, the most well-known black evangelical writer and preacher from the black power era, has had a successful racial reconciliation ministry because his approach to race has not militantly challenged white privilege in evangelical culture. He remains active in ministry at the time of this writing. Perkins's moderate approach to race has resulted in a constant stream of support and financial backing from wealthy, white evangelicals for his prolific career as a speaker, writer, and organizer. Specifically, Perkins, who had lived in California for over a decade before returning to his native Mississippi in the early sixties, was funded by the same Californian evangelical

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[1] Theon Hill, "Melvin Banks Had a Dream" *Christianity Today*, June 22, 2017. https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2017/june-web-only/melvin-banks-had-dream.html.

[2] Randy Frame, "Whatever Happened to Eldridge Cleaver: The Radical Black Panther-turned-Christian never found a home in the evangelical world." *Christianity Today*, April 20, 1984, 39.

businessmen, preachers, and associations that supported Billy Graham's historic 1949 crusade in Los Angeles, and continued to support Graham's ministry.[3] Perkins's relationships with these organizations have helped him to launch three community development associations, publish over a dozen of books, and speak on platforms around the globe on race and evangelical Christianity over a fifty-year period.

John Perkins's popularity has attracted him a great deal of scholarly attention in studies on evangelicalism. I agree with the predominate view of him in the historiography. Perkins is indeed a "founding father" of the racial reconciliation movement in evangelical ministries.[4] However, I think that John Perkins should also be considered as an astute and savvy businessman. In many respects, John Perkins personifies a lyric from the rapper and media mogul, Jay-Z. In the song, "Diamonds from Sierra Leone," Jay-Z proclaims, "I'm not a businessman, I'm a business, man!"[5] I think that this line applies to John Perkins because of the way he navigated the racial politics of both the National Black Evangelical Association (NBEA), and the broader, white evangelical culture to maintain a good rapport with black evangelicals, and to uphold his business relationships with his white funders. Perkins branded himself as, "the black apostle to white evangelicals," and he used this brand to thrive in evangelical ministry *and* in business.[6]

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[3]For example, Perkins received supported the Christ for Greater Los Angeles Committee.

[4] Scholars Cheryl J. Sanders (2013), and Christian Smith and Michael Emerson (2001) have designated John Perkins as one of three "founding fathers of the racial reconciliation movement." The other two named were Tom Skinner and Samuel Hines (1929-1995), who pastored Third Street Church of God in Washington, D.C. for nearly 25 years. For more information on Hines, see https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1995/01/08/samuel-hines-dies/4b0e9373-665c-488c-9f67-cdf24140a876/?utm_term=.fe19d75e4c89.

[5] Kanye West and Shawn "Jay Z" Carter, "Diamonds from Sierra Leone (Remix)." *Late Registration.* Roc-A-Fella/Def Jam, 2005.

[6] See Peter Slade's essay, "A Quiet Revolution and the Culture Wars" in *Mobilizing for the Common Good: The Lived Theology of John Perkins* edited by Peter Slade, Charles Marsh, and Peter Godwin Heltzel. University of Mississippi Press (2013), 69.

As Chapter 3 explains, the NBEA, under the presidency of William Bentley, was undergoing a militant shift by the mid-seventies. Men like Bentley, Columbus Salley, and Tom Skinner were influencing the organization towards embracing black history and culture, empowering black business owners, and most importantly, evangelizing in inner-cities, spaces that white evangelicals neglected in their associations. Although the NBEA was increasingly becoming more radical, its membership continued to include blacks and whites across the political spectrum. In 1974, John Perkins, who was a moderate, was serving as the NBEA's vice-president. The association's annual meeting was held in Dallas, Texas, and the association gathered under the theme of, "Survival? Certainly" to ponder their status as both black and evangelical.[7]

Perkins gave an address at the convention that called for a more visible "black evangelicalism" and for the development of "black evangelical theology."[8] Perkins encouraged black evangelicals to think about God and the bible on their own terms, and not in the manner that white theologians taught to them to think. These lines from Perkins's address are rather intriguing to me for several reasons; however, the most significant is that Perkins's address represents his ability to code-switch.[9] John Perkins talks about race in a more radical manner when speaking to black audiences, and he takes a more moderate approach when speaking to

[7] "Black Evangelicals: Surviving the Scene." *Christianity Today. (*April 26, 1974.): 48.
[8] Ibid., 48.
[9] One other reason is that John Perkins did not have any theologically training. He was not educated beyond the third-grade. While he could have very well been self-educated, and read theological materials recommended to him before and after his conversion, and even read materials to support his development as a Christian, I am wondering how much Perkins may have just been repeating what other black evangelicals had already said.

whites. I believe that John Perkins's shrewd approach to code-switching is to key to his success as a businessman in evangelical ministry.[10]

John Perkins read the militant shift of the NBEA, and he used his address to appeal to the radical sensibilities of the majority population in that association. In other words, Perkins was simply talking about race, or blackness, in a manner that was relevant to his audience at that moment. NBEA speakers had been making the same recommendations at the annual convention since 1969. Recall from the previous chapter that Columbus Salley's address sparked the NBEA's radical turn.[11] Salley's address also galvanized the NBEA to financially support John Perkins, who was languishing in a Mississippi prison in 1969.[12]

Perkins, primarily because of his because of his California business connections, had always maintained his distance from the civil rights movement. However, his work among the poor in Mississippi forced Perkins to advocate for voting rights as a means to improve the daily lives of the people he served. Perkins's work as an activist made him the target of police brutality, and he wrote about his experiences in his 1976 books, *Let Justice Roll Down* and *A Quiet Revolution*.

Interestingly, I think that John Perkins considered his first two books to be his unique contributions to the development of "black evangelical theology." Perkins writes about his life in the Deep South as a black man, and he explains how his commitment to Christianity helped him

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[10] Gene Demby, "How Code-Switching Explains the World," Codeswitch: Race and Identity Remixed, National Public Radio, April 8, 2013, https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2013/04/08/176064688/how-code-switching-explains-the-world. This article offers an in-depth definition and analysis of code-switching.

[11] While the text of Columbus Salley's address has not been located, several scholars have discussed the impact of his speech at the 1969 convention. The only primary source coverage of the convention is William Bentley's 1979 history of the NBEA.

[12] Ronald C. Potter's, "The New Black Evangelicals" in *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979* edited by Gayraud S. Wilmore and James H. Cone, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979), 304-305 covers Salley's support of Perkins at the 1969 NBEA convention.

to forgive and love the white police officers who brutally beat him for his work in voter registration. These books also introduce his message of, "The 3Rs."[13] In short, Perkins preaches that wealthy and talented Christians should *relocate* to underprivileged communities, *reconcile* to God and to their underprivileged neighbors, and *redistribute* their wealth and talents to the underprivileged to help them to develop their own skills and make their own money.

The 3 Rs are based on New Testament scriptures, and they articulate a belief that race relations can be improved by spiritual actions (missions, conversion, and charity) alone. Perkins, though he knew from personal experience that political action was also necessary, did not make any direct calls for civil rights action in his work. Therefore, Perkins's writings are not reflective of "black evangelical theology." Rather, they are examples of evangelical theology written by a black man.

The rationale for my distinction forces me to provide an answer to the question: What makes evangelical theology black? To be succinct, black evangelical theology, like black liberation theology, emerged in direct response to the black power movement. What was distinct about this movement was that it lacked the respectability politics of the civil rights movement. Black leaders and thinkers were increasingly crafting their calls for justice and equality with the language and unapologetic attitudes of the street, and not the pulpit. When Clarence Hilliard called white evangelicals to give up the "Honky Christ" and identify with the "Funky Jesus," he was combining the language of everyday black people with an evangelical teaching on how Christians could be more "Christ-like." Hilliard's act of re-articulating evangelical theology in

[13] The "3Rs" concept was first fully discussed in Perkins's book, *With Justice For All: A Strategy for Community Development*, which was originally published in 1982 by Baker Books. However, the groundwork for his thoughts about community development is fully developed in his 1976 books. Perkins himself relocated from California back to Mississippi to preach to the poor in his hometown, he became reconciled to them and to racist whites in the areas through acts of services and forgiveness, and he used ministry to redistribute resources in the community.

the hip and cool lingo of the ghetto and soul music is one ingredient that made evangelical theology black. Hilliard unapologetic condemnation of white Christians for their hypocrisy with respect to racism is another distinctly black approach to evangelical theology. A final example, Hilliard's emphatic demand that Jesus be viewed in his proper historical context: a poor, Palestinian Jew living as a second-class citizen in the Roman Empire. By forcing evangelicals to view Jesus in this manner, Hilliard was stressing the extent to which God identified with the oppressed. Further, he was calling for God's followers to take direct social and political action towards improving the plight of the oppressed. These factors are the essentials of black evangelical theology.

John Perkins's close affiliation with Clarence Hilliard, and other writers of black evangelical theology, who were active and present at the NBEA convention in 1974, would have made him familiar with the predicaments that these men found themselves in when they presented black evangelical theology to white Christians. John Perkins understood that if he wanted to keep his ministry afloat, he could not afford to write the black evangelical theology that he had pitched to the NBEA. At the same time, he understood that he had to speak the language of the NBEA—the only evangelical association that supported his work as a civil rights activist—while he was working with that organization. However, because white, wealthy evangelicals in California were supporting *his* organizations, Perkins knew that he could not talk about race and evangelicalism in a manner that would offend his primary backers.

John Perkins once explained that he wrote and preached in manner that white Christians were able to, "release some of their guilt without hearing somebody who is going to tell them

that they are totally absolutely lost."[14] When I read this quote in context, I understand that Perkins means, "a black person" when he says, "somebody" in the last quote. This is yet another example of Perkins's ability to code-switch, to use language to his advantage to maintain his good relationship with wealthy whites.

John Perkins is a lot like Jay-Z to me. Jay-Z himself knows that other rappers are much better than he is on lyrical content and delivery. For example, Jay-Z has cited Talib Kweli and Common as being better representatives of hip-hop culture because their lyrical content includes social commentary, and they promote black pride and culture.[15] Additionally, Jay-Z has cited Big Daddy Kane and Rakim, two artists routinely praised for their approach to rapping, as being influential to his style of delivery.[16] Nevertheless, Jay-Z will go down in history as the rapper who established "the blueprint" for becoming a successful executive off the stage.[17] Jay-Z not only raps about building personal wealth, he has gone beyond the mic to establish himself in a variety of industries including clothing, real estate, and sports management. Jay-Z's high degree of visibility makes it easy for people who are unfamiliar with rap music and culture to assume that he is the best rapper of his hip-hop generation. That assumption could lead to a distortion in how the history of hip-hop is told by those who only reference him, and do not pay attention to

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[14] Slade, 69.

[15] See Shawn Carter and Marshall B. Mathers, "Moments of Clarity." *The Black Album.* Roc-A-Fella/Def Jam, 2003

[16] For an example of Jay Z talking about his influences, see, Joshua Espinoza, Shawn Setaro, and Sean Stout, "Jay Z Thanks These Artists for Inspiring Him, Releases Induction Speech From Obama," *Complex Magazine*, June 15, 2017, https://www.complex.com/music/2017/06/jay-z-tweets-list-of-people-who-have-inspired-him. For an example of the influence of Big Daddy Kane and Rakim on hip-hop culture, see Fidel Martinez, "Ranking the 20 Greatest Rappers of All Time," *MSN*, January 24, 2018, https://www.msn.com/en-us/music/grammy/ranking-the-20-greatest-rappers-of-all-time/ss-AAv7Czb#image=18.

[17] I am referring to the title of Jay Z's trilogy project, *The Blueprint 1, 2,* and *3* here. The albums were released by Roc-A-Fella/Def Jam in 2001, 2002, and 2009, respectively.

those individuals who have been overshadowed by him to tell a more complete story. This has certainly been the case with John Perkins.

John Perkins has had a high degree of visibility in evangelical culture over the last six decades. Therefore, the available historical and journalistic writing on black evangelicals during the black power era have made it easy to assume that Perkins was the leading black voice on improving race relations between white and black evangelical Christians. Yet, even John Perkins has cited Tom Skinner as a significant influence on him as a preacher, and as being more authentic about the problem of racism in evangelical culture than he was. In an obituary from Skinner in *Christianity Today*, John Perkins stated that evangelical audiences were more receptive of him than they were of Tom Skinner because he "seemed moderate in comparison."[18] Further, Perkins stated, "no one had done more to build bridges between black and white evangelicals than Skinner."[19] Therefore, it is clear that Perkins stands out in evangelical histories because he consistently code-switched.[20]

At a moment when the NBEA was talking about the black social revolution and evangelical theology, John Perkins stood before that body and talked about developing a distinct black identity in evangelicalism. However, when it came to his own personal evangelistic ventures, John Perkins spoke the language of his financial backers. Where Jay Z rhymes about his transition from the projects to personal prosperity, John Perkins talks about his rise from an

[18] "Obituary: Leukemia Claims Evangelist Tom Skinner," *Christianity Today,* July 18, 1994.
[19] Ibid., "Obituary: Leukemia Claims Evangelist Tom Skinner," *Christianity Today,* July 18, 1994.
[20] I use the word "consistently" here because from what I have read and from available audio from my subjects, all of them code-switched to some degree when talking with black or white audiences. However, the Hilliard example shows that even though he knew that his article was going to be published in *Christianity Today*, and he intended to preach it before a predominately white audience, he didn't censor his language to appear respectable.

impoverished son of sharecroppers and bootleggers to a man of "purposeful prosperity."[21] John Perkins is at once a minister and a mogul, a business, man.

Where Perkins is usually cited in an introduction on race and evangelical Christianity, I have used the example of his ministry in this chapter to talk about the interconnectedness of evangelism and entrepreneurship. There are several studies on evangelical Christianity's influence on corporate America. Bethany Moreton's 2009 study, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart*, examines the role of fundamental Christianity in the retail chain's institutional origins.[22] Kevin Kruse's 2015 book, *One Nation under God*, explores how big companies such as Du Pont and General Motors hired ministers to convince consumers to purchase products.[23] This chapter joins the conversations started by Moreton and Kruse by examining how the black power movement created opportunities for the creation, and re-creation of racial identity and racial hierarchies through the production of black evangelical brands.

Other Enterprising Black Evangelicals

In the careers of Tom Skinner, Melvin Banks, and Eldridge Cleaver, there are examples of how these enterprising men were able to promote and sell ideas about black identities in order to win souls to Christ, and to make profits in new and novel ways. Where these men were previously working and operating in predominately black spaces, Skinner, Banks, and Cleaver were integrating white evangelical businesses in an unprecedented manner by the mid-1970s. I argue that they were able to integrate these spaces because their products encouraged conversion

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[21] Cheryl J. Sanders uses "purposeful prosperity" to describe Perkins's approach to prosperity as reflected in his philosophy in his third R. See Sanders in Slade, Marsh, and Heltzel, 134.

[22] See Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Walmart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2009.

[23] See Kevin Kruse, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (New York: Basic Books, 2015).

and growth as a Christian as the means to resolve the social problems of the inner-city. White evangelical businessmen, as the Perkins example shows, shared this belief and they invested in black evangelicals who carried this message to America's ghettoes.

At the same time, Skinner, Banks, and Cleaver were limited by the system of Jim Crow that was maintained within the businesses and associations that sponsored their work. In short, white evangelical businessmen-imposed limits on how much of the black experience could be conveyed in the products that black evangelicals produced for predominately white audiences. For example, a white evangelical press published Tom Skinner's "Blaxploitation" comic book version of his memoir, but another press would not permit Melvin Banks to include images of black children in Sunday School materials sold to white churches.[24] However, Banks was undeterred. I argue here that while segregation is traditionally viewed as a negative factor in U.S. race relations, within the context of evangelical ministry during the black power era, segregation had some positive benefits for black evangelicals. Ultimately, black evangelical businesses such as Banks's, Urban Ministries, Inc., served important functions in black churches beyond the spreading of the gospel and the making of money.

The ministries of Skinner, Banks, and Cleaver also provide insights into how blacks continued to respond to developments in the black freedom struggle along militant and accommodationist lines. I examine the work of evangelical Christian publications and mainstream black magazines to tease out how different black populations were responding to

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[24] Robert Repino and Tim Allen have written an essay for the Oxford African American Studies Center that provides an excellent reference essay on this particular movie genre titled, "Blaxploitation, from *Shaft* to *Django*." The article was published in 2013. In short, Repino and Allen describes how the genre was first frowned upon for its glorification of crime, sex, and violence in black communities, but the movies have since been praised for their ability to reflect the changing nature of how blacks were representing themselves and their communities during the black power era. Blaxploitation films featured characters who commanded authority and respect without respect to traditional (white) standards of social decorum.

black evangelical business brands. As earlier previous examples have shown, there was no unified black response to the black power movement within black evangelicalism.

On the one hand, the individual example of John Perkins shows that some black evangelicals may have used the language of black power ideologies for their own personal benefit. On the other hand, a publication that I examine later in the chapter suggests that some black evangelicals rejected Afrocentric philosophies because they believed that being "pro-black" automatically meant being "anti-Christian" and therefore, "anti-white" and "anti-American." I argue that this belief not only reflects the extent to which some black people truly believed in the generally accepted view that Christianity was synonymous with whiteness and Americanism, but also the extent to which they believed in their own perceived inferiority as blacks in the church and in society. This mentality demonstrates how deeply entrenched the legacies of slavery and Jim Crow shaped everyday life for black people in this country through the black power era. The next three sections considers three black evangelicals who responded to conversations on the black power movement and evangelical Christianity with creative depictions of black identity that affirmed racial pride, black economic development, and Christian faith.

Up from Harlem: Tom Skinner, John Shaft, and Salvation in the Inner-City

By 1975, Tom Skinner was a busy man. If James Brown was the "hardest working man in show business" in the seventies, then Tom Skinner was the hardest working black evangelical preacher in evangelical ministry.[25] In the five years since his appearance at the InterVarsity

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[25] James Brown was often billed as "the hardest working man in entertainment" due to his heavy touring schedule. According to sources, Brown often toured "51 weeks a year in his prime." See, Clive Morgan, "James Brown: The Man, The Myths, and Life on the Road by Martha High," Culture: Music, The Telegraph, May 3, 2016,

conference, Skinner expanded the reach of the Tom Skinner Association (TSA) beyond college campus ministries. The TSA provided afterschool programs, prison ministries, marriage and family retreats, and a host of other services in black neighborhoods in New York and New Jersey. TSA newsletters indicate that Skinner was speaking all over the country to spread the association's message at denominational conferences, church services, and various community events. Skinner was also serving in organizations outside of the TSA. Since 1973, Skinner began serving as a team chaplain for several professional sports teams, including the Oakland A's and the Washington Redskins. Moreover, in 1974, Tom Skinner was the chairperson of the executive board of the NBEA.

Amid all these activities, Skinner continued to write books and essays on his ideas about how to adapt evangelical Christianity to the needs of blacks in the inner-city. Though he had published several books since 1968, his first book, *Black and Free*, continued to capture the attention of white evangelical publishers. Skinner's story of his conversion from a Harlem gangbanger to an evangelical preacher, who operated outside of the traditional black church in the fifties and sixties, was indeed a fascinating tale. White evangelicals would have seen in Skinner a spiritual ally that they did not have in more prominent black preachers like Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. and Martin Luther King, Jr. Shortly after its release by Zondervan Publishing, Skinner's memoir was published as a mini-booklet titled, *Now, I'm Free*, by Ray Johnson of Life Messengers. Since 1956, Johnson, a graduate of Moody Bible Institute, specialized in publishing "witnessing booklets," or tracts that instructed an individual on how to accept Jesus Christ as their "Lord and Savior." Johnson's own booklet, *Here's How*, had been

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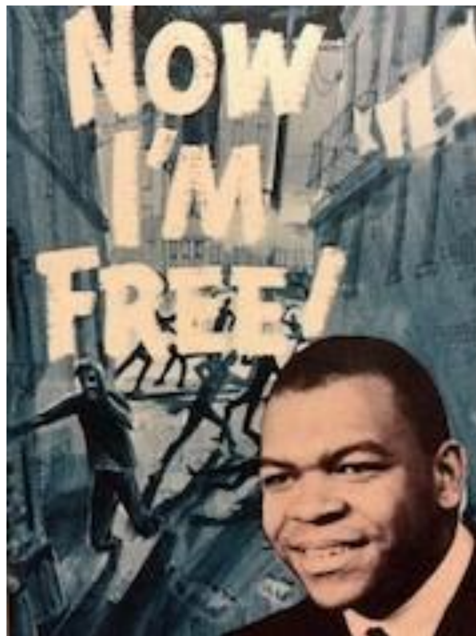
https://www.telegraph.co.uk/music/what-to-listen-to/james-brown-the-man-the-myths-and-life-on-the-road-by-martha-hig/.

printed in over 65 million copies and translated into multiple languages by the time of his death in 2010.[26]

It is unclear from Skinner's papers how he and Johnson began working together to publish *Now, I'm Free*. However, I have found among Skinner's collection various essays and flyers to promote his early work with the Harlem Evangelistic Association, which was also briefly known as the Tom Skinner Crusades, before it was transformed into the TSA in 1970. Skinner's early essays appeared in prominent evangelical publications such as, *Christian Life*, and it is possible that Johnson could have come across Skinner in one of those magazines. It is also likely that Skinner could have come across one of Johnson's witnessing tracts as he developed relationships for his earlier associations. However, there are four things that I am clear on with respect to the booklet, *Now, I'm Free*.



[26] Ray Johnson's obituary in The Seattle Times provides the most detailed account of his life and his ministry, beyond what could be analyzed from the Tom Skinner booklet. Johnson's obituary can be found here: http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/seattletimes/obituary.aspx?pid=146007696.

Figure 4.1. "Now I'm Free By Tom Skinner." Religious Life Tract Messengers, 1970.

First, the compact size of the booklet, roughly the size of a 3 by 5-index card, would have made it easy for Skinner and his team to distribute his message to passersby when Skinner preached and promoted his crusades on street corners in Harlem, Chicago, and other cities where he crusaded. Therefore, it would have been shrewd on Skinner's part to have these booklets published so that he could quickly spread his evangelical message. Second, the content of the booklet shares just enough of Skinner's book, *Black and Free*, to pique additional interest in, and solicit purchases of, the complete memoir. Skinner does not appear to have held any other job other than that of an evangelist, so generating book sales through the booklet would have contributed to the income of his ministry and his household.

Third, the back flap of the book offers special deals on additional purchases of the booklet. For example, for $2, a person could receive one copy of 10 other "fascinating booklets," plus 20 copies of *Now, I'm Free*. This deal was offered because Johnson's publishing country wanted to spread the gospel before the second-coming of Jesus Christ, which they believed could happen at any moment.[27] On the last page of the booklet, the publishing company urges, "This compact, stirring message in this booklet should be shared by everyone! Get an armful, and recruit others to help you distribute them. **Time is running out!**"[28] The bold lettering in this advertisement is intriguing because it shows how evangelical entrepreneurs were able to

[27] I am referring here to the Christian theological concept of "eschatology," which is concerned with the Second Coming of Christ and based on Matthew 24:36. I believe that Christians were able to use Jesus's words in this passage, "But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father," to force potential converts to immediately accept Christ before Christ returned to the earth. Also, the passage signifies to believers to remain diligent in both spiritual growth and proselytizing.
[28] The booklet, Now, I'm Free, does not have page numbers. But, the quote is found on the last page of the booklet. It was published in 1968 by Life Messengers.

financially benefit from "end-times" theology.[29] Some version of this message was typical to a Life Messengers tract. Like Skinner, Johnson does not appear to have had any other job outside of his publishing company, so *Now, I'm Free* also contributed to the prosperity of Johnson's ministry and household as well.

Finally, Skinner and Johnson's publishing relationship served to give Skinner some additional exposure to white evangelicals, and to give Life Messengers more exposure in black communities. Skinner's *Now, I'm Free* would have undoubtedly been featured in one of the "bundled" deals described above and distributed to white communities. It is likely that Tom Skinner was the first black evangelical preacher to have a witnessing tract published by Ray Johnson. Prior to Tom Skinner's Harlem Evangelistic Association, no other black evangelistic association was in operation. The most well-known black evangelical preacher before Skinner was a man named, B.M. Nottage.

B.M. Nottage and his brothers, T.B. and Whitfield, planted evangelical churches in black communities in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Detroit between 1921 and 1932. B.M. Nottage was mostly based in Detroit, where he had a popular radio ministry.[30] Nottage was also regularly invited to speak at Moody Bible Institute, where Johnson matriculated. Therefore, it is possible that Johnson could have published a tract by Nottage and had some exposure to black communities through Nottage's ministry. However, at the time of this writing, there is only one

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[29] See Note 28.

[30] A brief profile of Nottage and his brothers can be found on the following website, http://cornerstonemagazine.org/2017/01/12/heroes-of-the-faith-brothers-beloved-berlin-m-nottage/. The essay, "Heroes of the Faith: Brothers Beloved –Berlin M. Nottage" was adapted by David Dunlap from Nottage's book, Facts of the Faith: (Grand Rapids: Michigan, 1972). Dunlap must own a personal copy of the book because it is out-of-print and unavailable on rare book sites. The website for Cedine Ministries, a bible retreat camp, shows another reflection of Nottage's influence. Paul Zimmerman, the founder of the camp, was encouraged by Nottage to start the ministry. See, Our Story, here https://cedine.org/about/our-story/.

record of a publication by Nottage, and it does not appear to be a witnessing tract. Even if Ray Johnson had published a booklet by Nottage, Tom Skinner's story would have given Johnson's publishing company access to a different demographic of black people. Skinner was significantly younger than Nottage, and his story of his conversion, from a life of crime in Harlem to black evangelical preacher, gave Life Messengers an opportunity to publish tracts that had the potential to reach drug users, gangsters, prostitutes, and other "urban characters" that Skinner wrote about in his memoir.

While the booklet, *Now, I'm Free*, provided Skinner with a useful and compact product to disseminate while preaching, his memoir's second adaptation as a comic book is more telling about the influence of the black power movement on Skinner's ministry and his entrepreneurial endeavors. Squire Christian Comics (SCC) released Skinner's memoir as a comic book, *Up from Harlem*, in 1975. There is nothing in Skinner's papers to explain how Skinner and Squire Comics met one another. So, I am making the same assumptions that I made above about his relationship with Life Messengers. Skinner's features in popular Christian magazines, and the uniqueness of his Harlem story, would have made him attractive to white evangelical publishers. However, my investigation into Skinner's comic book has led me to realize that SCC, an imprint of the Fleming H. Revell Company, was based in Old Tappan, New Jersey, a mere twenty-two miles from where Skinner was based in Harlem. It is possible that the comic book company and Skinner's association had some degree of contact with one another through other evangelical organizations.

What I can confirm is that Skinner's story gave SCC its most original content to date for an adaptation. For two years, SCC had been primarily publishing an evangelical version of

Archie Comics.[31] Al Hartley, who had worked as a cartoonist for several companies including, Marvel Comics, began working for SCC in the late sixties after becoming a born-again Christian. Hartley previously freelanced with Archie Comics, and he brokered the deal to adapt Archie with stories about how to use the bible to confront typical teen-ager issues around dating, friendships, and family life. It was Hartley who adapted Skinner's memoir as a comic book, and it was the first of twelve biographical adaptations published by SCC.[32]

The most fascinating aspect of the *Up from Harlem* comic book is its visual presentation of Tom Skinner. The comic book version of Skinner creatively represents the shift in gender and sexual politics from those of the civil rights movement to the black power movement. On the cover of Skinner's memoir and the subsequent booklet, Skinner is seen by himself with a clean-shaven face, close-cropped hair, and dressed in a suit and tie. On the back cover of the memoir, and in the inside flap on the booklet, there is a family photo of Skinner, his first wife, Vivian, and their oldest daughter, Lauren. Vivian and Lauren Skinner are both clothed in modest dresses, their hair is straightened, and they are posed in front of Tom, who is standing over them with his hands placed lovingly and protectively around the two of them. Skinner and his family are "dressed neatly, as if going to church."[33]

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[31] Archie Comics recently became the subject of an academic work. English professor, Bart Beaty's *12-Cent Archie* was published in 2017 by Rutgers University Press. The book examines the comic's influence on American pop culture.

[32] There is no mention of Skinner's comic book in his collected papers at Wheaton College. The website, Christian Comics International, has done a wonderful job of documenting pioneering Christian cartoonists and comic book companies. Al Hartley's page can be found here: http://www.christiancomicsinternational.org/hartley_pioneer.html.

[33] Marisa Chappell, Jenny Hutchinson, and Brian Ward, "Dress Modestly, Neatly…As if You Were Going to Church": Respectability, Class, and Gender in the Montgomery Bus Boycott and Early Civil Rights Movement" in *Gender and the Civil Rights Movement* edited by Peter Ling and Sharon Montieth. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004, 69-100.

I borrowed that line from the title of an essay by Marissa Campbell, Jenny Hutchinson, and Brian Ward featured in a collection called, *Gender and the Civil Rights Movement*[34] The essay explains how dress and proper gender performance was essential to civil rights activists' ability to present themselves as decent, respectable men and women worthy of American citizenship. Had Skinner been a civil rights activist, those pictures would have conveyed that exact message to his audience. Skinner was not a civil rights activist, though his ministry in Harlem was designed to address civil rights issues in the community. Nonetheless, Skinner was still bound to the politics of black respectability as a public leader. As an evangelical leader, Skinner was also bound to the politics of family values.

While the term "family values," has myriad meanings attached to it, I am using it here to say that Skinner represented a "God-fearing man," who was able to provide for and protect his wife and children, and who modeled for his household how to live life as a good Christian and as a good American citizen.[35] Tom Skinner personified the gender and sexual politics of both the evangelical movement and the civil rights movement, and as the latter movement transitioned into the black power movement, Skinner also transformed.

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[34] Ibid., 69-100.

[35] Seth Dowland's work*, Family Values and the Rise of the Christian Right,* explains how America's political obsession with respect to abortion, homosexuality, and pornography in the 1970s was grounded in the ideal of family values. Americans, especially evangelical Christians believed that if family conformed to high moral standards, society would also conform to those standards. Dowland's work was published in 2017 by the University of Pennsylvania Press.

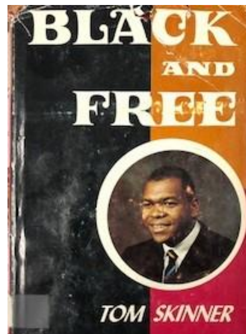

Figure 4.2 Black and Free Front Cover. Tom Skinner's *Black and Free* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970).

Figure 4.3 Black and Free Back Cover. Tom Skinner's *Black and Free* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970).

By 1970, the year that Skinner addressed InterVarsity, and two years after the publication of *Black and Free*, Skinner had grown an Afro, a full beard, and a mustache signaling his acceptance of the fashion standards that evolved out of the black power movement. As the movement developed, many black women and men began to reject white standards of beauty in terms of how they groomed their hair and their choice of clothing. Black women and men were increasingly wearing their hair in its naturally kinky state, instead of using chemicals and hot combs to straighten their manes. Black people also began to wear dashikis, and many adopted

the style of the Black Panthers, who were frequently seen in black leather jackets, jeans, and combat boots.

I have only come across two pictures of Skinner without a suit on in his personal papers.[36] However, from 1970 onward, Skinner maintained a full head of hair and facial hair, quite possibly to the dismay of white and black evangelicals who rejected the black power movement. The journalist Dan Orme once remarked, "I have heard the argument from both black and white sources that 'Afro' haircuts and other African cultural symbols are of anti-Christian culture."[37] Orme wanted to know what a group of young black militant evangelicals, who were inspired by Skinner, thought of that remark. These men unanimously refuted the idea that being "pro-black" meant being "anti-Christian," and therefore, also "anti-white," and "anti-American." One man responded, "Christ coming into my life doesn't negate my blackness but redeems it."[38] This line from Carl Ellis, an ardent follower of Skinner, offers a nice transition to my full examination of Skinner's comic book because that is the key message behind, *Up from Harlem*.

The following photos come from, or they are directly related to my analysis of Skinner's comic book.

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[36] Ed Gilbreath's *Christianity Today* article on Skinner includes a photo of Skinner with jeans and a T-shirt while walking on the beach. Skinner's papers collection includes a photo of him in the locker room of the Washington Redskins, he is dressed in sports gear.
[37] Orme, 21.
[38] Ibid., 21.

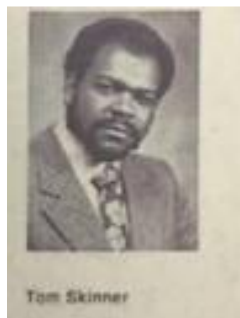

Figure 4.4 "Tom Skinner Crusade: A New Beginning Brochure." Papers of Tom Skinner Collection 430, Box 1, Folder 6. Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton College.

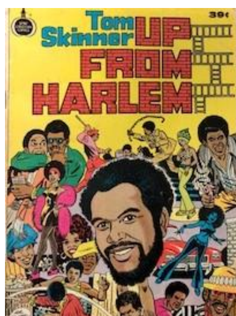

Figure 4.5 Al Hartley, *Up From Harlem*, Front Cover (Old Tappan: Squire Christian Comics, 1975.)

Figure 4.6 "Richard Roundtree as John Shaft." CBS. Public Domain. June 20, 1973, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Shaft#/media/File:Richard_Roundtree_1973.JPG.

Figure 4.6 Al Hartley, *Up From Harlem*, (Old Tappan: Squire Christian Comics, 1975.)

It is unclear whether it was Tom Skinner's decision, or the cartoonist, Al Hartley's, but the choice to adapt Skinner into an evangelical version of John Shaft in the comic book was brilliant. Consider the pictures above. The first photograph, in the top row on the left, is a promotional picture from a Tom Skinner event in 1973. This picture shows that while Skinner embraced the Afro hair style and facial hair that was popularized by the black power movement, he continued to wear suits in promotional pictures and when he preached. The photo on the right is the front cover of the comic book from 1975. The picture on the bottom left is a 1973 promotional picture of Richard Roundtree in character as John Shaft for the television series based upon the film, *Shaft*, and the picture next to it is the opening page of Skinner's comic book. Notice that Skinner, the black evangelical hero who "saves" Harlem is dressed in a dark jacket and turtleneck, just like John Shaft, another fictional Harlem hero.

John Shaft, the title character from the 1971 classic blaxploitation film epitomized black masculinity in the black power era.[39] In the original version of the film, Shaft is a private detective working in Harlem, who is hired by a black mobster to locate his missing daughter. The daughter has been kidnapped by an Italian crime syndicate. His status as a private detective

[39] Matthew Henry's essay, *"He's a Bad Mother*$%@!#": Shaft and Contemporary Black Masculinity"* in *African American Review* 38, 1: (2004): 119-126 offers an analysis of Shaft's role in representing shifting notions of black male identity from the black power movement to 2000, the year in which Shaft was remade for the 21st-century.

shows that he, as a black man, must work outside of, and in some cases, against the traditional means for getting justice. Shaft uses his street wisdom, hand to hand combat, and military-style planning and shooting to locate and rescue the mobster's daughter. When Shaft isn't conducting his investigation in the film, the character is seen flirting with a bevy of ladies, charming them with his cool, hip, sexy persona. Additionally, Shaft sleeps with quite a few of those women in the film.

I am intrigued that on the opening page of the comic book, Skinner is not only dressed exactly like John Shaft, he is also approached with the mission of saving a "lost woman," at the beginning of the story. That the woman speaks to Skinner first, and considering her style of dress, it could be implied that she is a prostitute. By the end of the story, Skinner "rescues" her with God's love, where Shaft would have saved her with his sex appeal. Skinner's conversation with the woman is one storyline in the comic; the other is his engagement with cynical black thugs and gangsters who ridicule him for preaching "the white man's religion."

Skinner, like Shaft, operates outside of the "traditional view" ways of doing things. In Skinner's case, he operates outside of the standard way of preaching and teaching Christianity. When the young black characters reject Skinner's message, claiming there are too many "dos" and "donts" in traditional Christianity, Skinner counters, "Jesus only gives us one rule, love. He wants us to love each other the way he loves us. And, he loves us just the way we are…And, brother, I need folks to love me the way I am."[40] The way Skinner was, in the comic book, and in his real life, based upon his writings and video clips of him speaking, was cool and street-wise. Further, Skinner was a proud black man who was masculine and had sex appeal and was

[40] Al Hartley, *Up From Harlem*, (Old Tappan: Squire Christian Comics, 1975.)

unafraid of deviating from the norm. Most importantly to his message, Skinner had love in his heart for God, himself, and for his black sisters and brothers.

What made Skinner as Shaft so brilliant in *Up from Harlem* is that it captured Skinner and other militant black evangelicals' message that one could be both pro-black and pro-evangelical. Like the booklet produced by Life Messengers, the comic book served Tom Skinner's ministry by creating another avenue for people to learn about it. The last page of the comic describes the mission and purpose of the TSA and it provides an address for people to write and receive materials about "Jesus and his love."[41] Skinner was not only communicating this message to black college students; the comic book published by a major evangelical publishing house allowed him to present that message to white and black parents and children who purchased Christian comics.

SCC comic books were primarily sold in Christian books stores. It is unknown how successful Skinner's comic book was for the company. However, as I stated above, *Up from Harlem* was the first of twelve biographical adaptations, and at least one other adaptation was about another prominent black Christian, the gospel singer, Andrae Crouch. This fact suggests to me that the comic books did fairly well for SCC considering that they continued to develop them, and that they were able to reach black and white Christian comic readers with stories about black urbanites who believed in Jesus Christ.

Tom Skinner's comic book is one example of how black evangelicals were able to utilize the black power movement to create a new product to use for evangelizing purposes. Skinner's adoption of Afro-centric fashion in reality as well as in his comic book caricature sold the idea

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[41] Al Hartley, *Up From Harlem*, (Old Tappan: Squire Christian Comics, 1975.)

that black people did not have to "become white" in order to embrace evangelical Christianity. Further, Skinner and his comic emphasized that God's love was not limited to whites. Urban blacks did not have to adapt their cultural beliefs and practices to receive salvation. They could be as cool as John Shaft was and still be acceptable to Jesus Christ.

Melvin Banks took another approach to the subject of black identity and evangelical Christianity during the black power era. In 1970, Banks created the first black owned and operated Sunday School curriculum publishing house. Where Skinner's memoir adaptations were created to advance evangelical ministry in blacks and white communities, Banks's publishing house, Urban Ministries, Inc., was created in direct response to racism and white privilege within evangelical culture as discussed below.

Urban Ministries, Inc: An Evangelical FUBU Before FUBU

In 1992, four young black men from Hollis, Queens founded a hip hop apparel company called, **FUBU**, which stood for, "For Us, By Us."[42] The company's name is significant for two reasons. One, Hollis, Queens was the birthplace of many notable figures in hip-hop culture, so it was fitting that hip-hop's first apparel company came out of that neighborhood.[43] Two, the company's primary target for its apparel shared the identity of its founders: young, urban youth who were ensconced in hip-hop culture. L.L. Cool J, a native of Hollis, became the first rapper to

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[42] A definitive history of **FUBU** has yet to be written. And, while the line is largely defunct in the U.S., Daymond John of television's Shark Tank was the primary visionary behind the brand. John's interview with Business Insider offers some insight into how the brand developed. See, Richard Feloni and Daniel Richards, "Before Daymond John became a millionaire on 'Shark Tank,' he was waiting tables at Red Lobster and talking his way onto LL Cool J's music video sets," *Business Insider,* January 29, 2018. http://www.businessinsider.com/daymond-john-fubu-founder-shark-tank-star-2018-1.

[43] The rap group, Run-DMC was one of the first hip-hop acts to put Hollis on the map with their song, "Christmas in Hollis." See Joseph Simmons, Darryl McDaniels, and Jason Mizell, "Christmas in Hollis." *Tougher Than Leather.* Profile Records, 1988.

endorse and model **FUBU** in his videos, and as result of the exposure, the **FUBU** line dominated hip-hop culture for over a decade.

FUBU stood out to me as a young hip-hop consumer because when the brand came out, I was just beginning to learn more about Malcolm X. My father took me to see Spike Lee's biographical film on the civil rights leader. I was intrigued by the fact that **FUBU** was a black-owned business for black people of my generation. This was the same type of business that Malcolm talked about in the sixties, and in my ten-year-old mind, I automatically assumed that **FUBU** was based on Malcolm X's teachings. The film made me also think about the disparity in the education I received at school as opposed to the one I received in Sunday School at the black Baptist church I grew up in.

Martin Luther King was the only black person I had seen in my grade school history textbooks. However, at church, there were biographies of black leaders in the Sunday School books, and on the posters that were displayed on the walls of the classrooms and hallways. It was not until I began this project that I learned that those posters, and the church's entire Sunday School and Vacation Bible School curriculum, came from Urban Ministries, Inc. UMI was founded in 1970 on the philosophy of, "for us, by us." Melvin Banks, the company's founder, was unable to convince his employer, Scripture Press Publications, to print illustrations of black children in their Sunday School materials. So, Banks created his own company for black churches in every Christian denomination.[44]

Melvin Banks was born in 1932 in Birmingham, Alabama. He earned a M.A. from Wheaton College in 1960, and that same year he began working at Scripture Press in Wheaton,

[44] Since the company's inception, UMI branded itself as an interdenominational, black religious publishing house.

Illinois. Banks was employed as a sales representative to black churches across the country. Though Banks credited Scripture Press for teaching him the basics of the publishing industry, he grew to resent the fact that he was pitching materials to black churches that did not connect to how their parishioners lived and worshiped. The materials by Scripture Press only included illustrations of white children with stories by white authors in their Sunday School products. In addition to his resentment towards Scripture Press, Banks was also feeling the pressure from the black freedom struggles of the 1960s.

Banks cites that he was not only influenced by Martin Luther King's call for equality and social justice, he was also influenced by the demands by black power activists for "Afrocentric control and economic power."[45] Melvin Banks was also a member of the NBEA. For nearly a decade, he served as the organization's Christian education commission chairman. He was present at the 1969 convention, and Banks agreed with the idea that evangelical theology needed to reflect the lived realities of black people in the U.S.

In published interviews about his life and company, Banks does not generally offer too many details about his attempts to convince his employers to produce contextualized content for black churches. However, I have made several inferences from various sources. One, Banks was unable to convince Scripture Press to add more diversity to their materials because white churches, particularly Southern white churches, would have refused to continue their business relationship with the company.[46] Two, Scripture Press, along with Zondervan and Tyndale House, two other major Christian publishing companies, provided seed money for the launching

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[45] Theon Hill, "Melvin Banks Had a Dream" *Christianity Today*, June 22, 2017. https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2017/june-web-only/melvin-banks-had-dream.html.

[46] See Judith St. Clair Hull, *Strategies for Educating African American Children,* (Chicago: Urban Ministries, Inc., 2006), 54. Hull offers a brief history of the founding of UMI and explains that Scripture Press was concerned about losing white customers if they published Banks's ideas.

of UMI. Therefore, Banks probably made a habit of not disclosing the full nature of his conflict with his employers to not offend them and appear to be unappreciative of their financial support.[47] Finally, Banks delivered a speech that he developed into an essay titled, “Ethnic-oriented Literature—Do We Need It?” The 1973 piece reveals more about the kinds of challenges Banks could have faced from both his employer, black churches, and their white governing bodies, where he sought to market his materials.

Melvin Banks’s speech was published in a collection of speeches in the book titled, *Black Evangelism-Which Way from Here?*. The book was published by Nazarene Publishing House in Kansas City, Missouri, the site of a Conference on Urban Ministries held in September of 1973. In the Prologue of the collection, Dr. R.W. Hurn, Executive Secretary of the Department of Home Missions, spelled out the development of missionary work in black communities by the Church of the Nazarene since 1948. Banks was clearly invited to speak at the conference because its organizers were concerned with how to continue to develop their missions to black communities, and Banks’s Sunday School material would have been useful to their missionary and Christian education projects.

In his speech, Melvin Banks lays out four common arguments that he had to refute about the necessity of his publishing company. He explains:

> One of the reasons that people say that we don’t need it is because God has made all people of one blood, so that there is no difference. ‘If there is no difference, why should we talk about ethnic literature? All that we need is one kind of literature.’ (And usually what they mean by that is *our* kind.) Or people will say, ‘When we accept Christ as our Saviour, is it not true that we become members of the body of Christ? And if we do, and then we start talking about ethnic literature, then we are separating the body of Christ.’ Another reason offered (and this is somewhat related) is that in our world one of the problems is separation, diffusion, polarization. ‘We need to bring people together, and

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[47] Banks discusses his relationship with Scripture Press in Theon Hill, “Melvin Banks Had a Dream” *Christianity Today*, June 22, 2017. https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2017/june-web-only/melvin-banks-had-dream.html.

> instead you talk about ethnic literature, which will divide us into groups again.' The final reason I'd like to mention is that the people say, 'Well, now, you know, talking about relating the Bible to where people live may have some merit, but really our job is to preach the gospel and leave it to the Holy Spirit to make the application as He sees fit.'[48]

Without mentioning the specific race of the individuals who posed these arguments to Banks, his wording suggests that the first argument was typically posed by white Christians. As mentioned above, Scripture Press published the "one kind of literature" that was made available to Sunday Schools throughout the country. Therefore, their (read, "our") kind of literature was the standard for everyone who of "one blood" in Christ. The second and third arguments most likely came from other black Christians who believed that the "separatist" language of "ethnic literature" would create further divisions in the church. Banks does not take up the issue that the "body of Christ" in the U.S. was already divided by racism. However, these arguments are examples of my earlier suggestion that segregation created a sustained inferiority complex in some black Christians. The very thought of contextualized Sunday School material made them believe that they would be creating more separation in American Christian churches, institutions that were founded on the idea that blacks were too inferior to worship alongside whites, and therefore black churches had to be created to accommodate black people. Of course, these arguments could have also been offered to Banks by white Christians as well.

The final argument seems to have come from the evangelical culture in which Banks was rooted and grounded. It reminds me of the example of Billy Graham from Chapter 1. Recall, Graham desegregated his crusades in the South in the early fifties so that he could "just preach the gospel" to the widest possible audience. However, Graham's actions did nothing to dismantle segregation at the political level. Further, it is quite possible that a white Southerner could have

[48] Melvin Banks, "Ethnic-Oriented Literature-Do We Need It" in *Black Evangelicalism-Where Do We Go From Here?* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1973), 47.

attended a Billy Graham crusade on a Friday afternoon, and participated in the lynching of a black man on that same Friday night. I realize that my last statement may be read as conjecture, but my point is that evangelical culture seems to suggest in historical and theological terms that if one merely preaches the gospel to oppressed people, then no other work is necessary to bring equality and justice to their social and political conditions.

Banks refutes these four arguments by first acknowledging that while they may have some validity, they are not premised on correct thinking about the work of "ethnic-oriented literature." Banks first suggests that the type of material he publishes meets black children where they are. He posits, "The very life-changing nature of the gospel itself requires that we get down to the nitty-gritty of where people live and then illustrate and explain in great detail, so that they can see themselves and know that you're talking to them and not some other group over there someplace." To illustrate, Banks explains that it is not helpful to show pictures to children who live in the projects images of a white family in the suburbs. He argues that it would be more useful to show them family dynamics in surroundings that looks like theirs so that they could understand that the messages in the lessons applied directly to them.

Banks then discusses the contextualized nature of Paul's epistles. For example, Banks says that when Paul wrote his letters to the church of the Corinthians he discussed local issues within in that church that did not apply to the church of Ephesus to whom his epistle, Ephesians was addressed. Banks then suggests that every book of the bible was written to "meet the need of the people to whom it was written."[49] Banks then turns attention to the public ministry of Jesus Christ.

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[49] Banks, 49.

Banks argues that while “the teachings of Christ have wide implications for all mankind, they are directed specifically to the needs of Jewish or other people living in Palestine during the time of His earthly sojourn.”[50] In other words, Banks is suggesting that Christians have already been in the business of making the teachings of Christ relevant to their respective cultures and values. He concludes by suggesting that Christians should model the communication skills of Jesus, who was able to effectively teach Jews, Samaritans, and Romans, because he understood how they would receive his message based on his understanding of their social positions. So, ultimately, Melvin Banks believed that the production of ethnic-oriented literature modeled the leadership of Jesus, and that the material was required to bring more people to Christianity by appealing to their unique perspectives of the world.

It is highly likely that Melvin Banks’s speech generated some business for him among the Church of the Nazarene’s black congregation. However, I think that the real impact of his address can be determined by three factors. First, Melvin Banks completely believed in the necessity of his company, and he practiced what he preached with respect to producing relevant educational materials for black churches. Between 1970 and 1982, Banks operated UMI out of his home basement. His early investors only provided about 30% of the capital required for the start-up, so Banks made a great deal of personal financial sacrifices to earn a living and to pay his staff. As of this writing, UMI continues to be the largest independent black-owned and operated Christian publishing company in the U.S. Second, UMI’s mission was supported by the black press.

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[50] Banks, 51.

In 1975, *Jet Magazine*, a weekly publication based out of Chicago, ran a feature on UMI. *Jet Magazine* was once hailed, as "The Negro's Bible."[51] The magazine offered comprehensive reporting on politics, entertainment, health and wellness, business, and religion in the black community. UMI's presence in *Jet Magazine* was significant because it granted the developing company an audience with everyday black people who could have been "unchurched," and perhaps would consider attending a church to read interpretations of the bible with their language and that depicted Jesus as a black man in its educational materials. Banks's appearance in *Jet* was also significant because no other black evangelical's ministry or business had been featured so prominently in the magazine during the black power era.[52]

While the feature titled, "Black Firm Injects Ghetto Language into The Bible," emphasizes how black jargon is prominently featured in UMI's materials, the unnamed author explains that the company, "won the top award for best Christian education publication of the year from the Evangelical Press Association in 1971."[53] This brief mention of the company's award would have signaled to contemporary audiences that UMI published materials worth reading. However, reading that line in the context of the development of black evangelical history offers a riveting point of analysis on the irony and complexity of the system of segregation.

Melvin Banks received that award from an association whose members would not even fight to keep him in their employ. Further, many organizations of the Evangelical Press

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[51] See Donald Tait, "Reading the Negro Bible: Online Access to Ebony and Jet," *Resources for American Studies* 62 2009, http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/39279/1/39279.pdf. Tait credits the comedian Redd Foxx for calling the magazine, "The Negro Bible."

[52] As of 2018, Jet's digital archives, there are three mentions of Tom Skinner, and one mention of John Perkins, but none of those articles highlights any significant detail about what those black evangelical leaders attempted to do with their ministries with respect to race and evangelical Christian culture.

[53] "Black Firm Injects Ghetto Language into the Bible," *Jet Magazine*, 1975, 6.

Association including Scripture Press, were content to sell materials to black churches, but they refused to develop unique content for black Christians. Rather than accommodate a man like Banks within their companies, they preferred to maintain the system of segregation by catering to white, Christian racists who believed that pictures of black people in Sunday School materials would have promoted inter-racial marriage. At the same time, the example of Melvin Banks shows that these same Christian segregationists were willing to invest in UMI, and they were willing to bestow honors on the company's black-oriented materials. This is especially ironic because while they were invested in keeping blacks and whites separate in Christian education books, they were also investing in the black power movement's call for black economic independence. Melvin Banks created UMI to be both pro-black and pro-evangelical, but white evangelicals viewed his organization as a "separate, but equal." I think that is why Banks was given that award, not simply because of his excellent content, but to assuage the guilt of the whites who created a need for an organization like UMI in evangelicalism.

The final way we can measure the impact of Melvin Banks's 1973 address before the Church of the Nazarene conference is by considering a quote from him that opens this chapter. In 2017, Banks sat down with Theon Hill of Wheaton College to do an interview for *Christianity Today.*[54] In a response to what distinguished the materials published by UMI, Banks said that his products improved the "self-esteem" of black people. Banks believed that black children "appreciated opening a book and seeing people looking like them." Further, he explained that, "many of our young people lacked knowledge and an appreciation of history," so, "we prioritized profiles of inventors, doctors, and lawyers in our materials." Banks concludes, "We

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[54] Theon Hill, "Melvin Banks Had a Dream" *Christianity Today*, June 22, 2017. https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2017/june-web-only/melvin-banks-had-dream.html.

lifted the horizons of many of our young people, so that they can realize that they can achieve just as much as other people."[55]

Banks does not talk about receiving letters from churches or Sunday School students about the impact of UMI's publications on their lives. He also does not he mention surveys or other data collection methods in the interview. So, it is unclear to me how he came to know for sure how his company positively affected the lives of black children. However, I am sure of two things. One, Melvin Banks's team did have an established method for evaluating the effectiveness of their materials in black churches. As mentioned above, Banks had advanced degrees in biblical and theological studies from Wheaton College. His 1973 speech shows that his theoretical approach to UMI's publications was grounded on the studies of American psychologists, A. H. Maslow and Kenneth and Mamie Clark.[56] Therefore, it is safe to assume that he considered and implemented approaches to institutional review and self-study over the course UMI's history. The strongest evidence that supports my assumption is Judith Hull's book, *Strategies for Educating African American Children*. UMI published the book in 2006. Although the book was published nearly four decades after Banks went into business, Hull discusses strategies developed by UMI for educating black students. Therefore, again, it is reasonable to assume that Banks developed strategies to measure his company's effectiveness over time.

Two, I know from personal experience that UMI's materials and biographies had the power to help black children to imagine a different possibility for themselves. UMI materials

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[55] Ibid.

[56] Banks quotes Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory in his 1973 essay. See, A. H. Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," Psychological Review 50 (1943): 370-396. Banks would have had also been familiar with Kenneth and Mamie Clark's work for their role in *Brown v. Board* (1954). In short, the Clarks measured how black children's self-esteem was damaged by segregation. For a bibliographical overview of Kenneth and Mamie Clark's studies on segregation and black children see, "Segregation Ruled Unequal, and Therefore Unconstitutional," *American Psychological Association,* 2018, http://www.apa.org/research/action/segregation.aspx.

were used in the black Baptist church I attended as a child. I always appreciated the black history biographical posters that were displayed prominently in the Sunday School hallway. It was in that hallway that I learned that I could celebrate black history every day, and not just during Black History Month. Also, I learned about figures other than Martin Luther King, Jr. I am grateful that Melvin Banks made the teaching of black history a central aspect of his ministry. Because I benefited from UMI, Inc., in my experience of growing in a black Baptist, I want to conclude my discussion on Banks with a conversation about the benefits of segregation.

In the midst of segregated communities, a spirit of black self-development arose. For example, Melvin Banks's approach and experience clearly shows that black-owned businesses were not just useful to ensure the economic independence of their founders, but they had positive psychological and spiritual benefits for the patrons of those businesses. Banks's UMI communicated the Gospel in a manner that affirmed black history and culture in American Christianity, a religion that has been used by those in power to oppress black bodies and minds through slavery and segregation. Banks's business shows that segregation forced black people to become creative, original, and productive in meeting the needs of black communities. We see this creativity and productivity in Banks's UMI in 1970, and in the creation of a hip hop apparel company like, **FUBU** in 1992.

The example of Melvin Banks also shows another aspect of how white financial backers influenced the development of black evangelical brands. Where the example of Skinner showed us that white evangelical publishing houses were willing to sell Skinner's unique conversion story to further the idea that salvation alone could solve the problems of the inner-city, Banks showed us that other evangelical publishing houses were content to maintain a "separate, but equal" approach to development of black evangelical business. Eldridge Cleaver offers another

window into the politics of white support of black evangelical brands. In short, Cleaver offers a more radical example of how exploitation colored the financial relationships between black and white evangelicals.

Soul on Ice, Soul on Fire: The Brief Evangelical Life of Eldridge Cleaver

In 1975, Eldridge Cleaver was a desperate man. Cleaver rose to fame in the late 1960s as the writer of an essay collection, *Soul on Ice*, and as the Black Panther Party's national spokesman.[57] The essays included in *Soul on Ice* were written while Cleaver was an inmate at California's Folsom State Prison on charges of theft, rape, and assault, and published as pieces in *Ramparts Magazine* before being compiled as a book. Cleaver became a follower of the teachings of Malcolm X while at Folsom, and his writings in *Soul on Ice* captures brilliant insights into Islam and black liberation ideology, the American penal system, and war. The book was highly-acclaimed and became one of the handbooks for the black power movement. For as brilliant as Cleaver was in most of his essays, a few of the pieces in *Soul on Ice* reveals a brutal side to his thinking about gender and black male sexuality.

Cleaver talks about his two-pronged approach to the act of rape. Cleaver committed rape against white women as an "insurrectionary act."[58] He explains:

> It delighted me that I was defying and trampling upon the white man's law, upon his system of values, and that I was defiling his women—and this point, I believe, was the most satisfying to me because I was resentful over the historical fact of how the white man has used the black woman. I was getting revenge.[59]

[57] Cleaver's title was actually, Minister of Information.
[58] Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: Random House, 1992), 33.
[59] Ibid.

To develop his skill as a rapist of white women, Cleaver explained that he raped “black girls in the ghetto” for “practice.”[60] Though, Cleaver acknowledged that he was wrong in his thinking about rape just a few paragraphs later, I still find myself offended, but also fascinated by those lines when I think about Cleaver’s relationship with evangelical Christians in the late 1970s.

Soul on Ice reflects the influence of the Nation of Islam on Cleaver’s thinking about Christianity. In short, Cleaver also believed that Christianity was, “the white man’s religion,” and that the religion had created white supremacy and black social inferiority. In one of his most notable quotes as the spokesman for the Black Panther Party, Cleaver called for armed revolutionary violence against “the agents of racism, Capitalism, and Christianity.”[61] Cleaver gained national attention by verbally sparring with Ronald Reagan, then governor of the state of California, who personified the relationship between racism, Capitalism, and Christianity for Cleaver, in news interviews. Reagan once declared, “If Eldridge Cleaver is allowed to teach our students, they may come home one night and slit our throats!” Cleaver responded by calling the governor a “clown” and a “pig.” However, in 1975, just seven years after the release of *Soul on Ice,* and four years after his expulsion from the Black Panther Party, Eldridge Cleaver became an evangelical Christian and a supporter of Ronald Reagan to help himself out of his desperate situation.

Eldridge Cleaver and his wife, Kathleen, fled the United States in 1968, after Cleaver was involved in a shoot-out with police two days after the assassination of Martin Luther King. Cleaver traveled to Cuba, Algiers, and France during that seven-year period, and he established international chapters of the Black Panther Party. However, Cleaver’s relationship with other

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[60] Ibid.

[61] “Whatever Happened to Eldridge Cleaver,” *Ebony Magazine*, March 1998, 66.

Panther leaders who remained in the U.S. gradually deteriorated over conflicting ideas about how to resolve several issues in Panther branches in Oakland, New York, and Paris. Cleaver's expulsion from the Panthers in 1971 left him without his primary institutional base to support him and his family while they lived in exile. Further, Cleaver was becoming increasingly disillusioned with his Communist contacts abroad. Cleaver's profound sense of disconnection made him contemplate suicide in November of 1975.

The former Panther reasoned that if he killed himself, he could make life easier for his wife and children. However, before he could jump to his death from the balcony of his apartment in Paris, Cleaver claimed that he saw a vision of Jesus Christ in the night sky. Rather than jump, Cleaver knelt and prayed and decided to return to the United States and face the charges brought against him in 1968.

Cleaver spent the first eight months of 1976 in the Alameda County Jail of San Diego. During his time in prison, Cleaver connected with a prison ministry known as the "God Squad," and he eventually became a "born again" Christian. Cleaver claims, in his lesser-known work, *Soul on Fire*, that he did not convert at a prayer service because he did not want to appear "soft" to other inmates, so he "invited Christ into his life" while he was alone in his cell. News of Cleaver's relationship with the God Squad was somehow leaked to the *L.A. Times*, and they in turn reported on his conversion.

Cleaver's attorney's initially thought the *L.A. Times* article would weaken any chance that Cleaver had with establishing support with his former radical connections. However, the article caught the attention of Art De Moss, an evangelical businessman from Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. De Moss pledged $50,000 of his own money and solicited the support of other evangelicals to raise a total of $100,000 for Cleaver's bail. De Moss not only helped Cleaver to

get out of his prison, De Moss introduced the former Panther to other prominent evangelicals including, Chuck Colson and Billy Graham.

Graham and Cleaver spent time in prayer together at a Graham event in San Diego, and Graham advised Cleaver, "One thing you must never forget, never embarrass the Lord."[62] Soon after meeting with Graham, Cleaver was featured in a *Newsweek* article on October 25, 1976. The article proclaimed 1976 as "the year of the evangelical."[63] The authors were primarily highlighting the possibility of Jimmy Carter becoming the first "born-again" president, and the article includes profiles of several notable figures who had recently came out as evangelical. Cleaver's inclusion in the piece not only served to drive home the point that evangelicalism was on the rise in the U.S., but Cleaver was propped up in the piece to show that the movement had a new black spokesperson, who could draw other black people into it.

The Newsweek piece is important here because it underscores the centrality of conversion stories to evangelicals. The writers explain, "Nothing moves evangelicals more than listening to a convert describe the details of his conversion experience."[64] Eldridge Cleaver quickly picked up on that fact, and he spent the next two years making a living by selling his conversion story to evangelicals.

On June 1, 1977, Cleaver launched the Eldridge Cleaver Crusades with the publication of, "The Crusader," the newsletter for his new organization. Within the span of ten months, Cleaver spoke at thirty colleges and universities and over twenty churches, talking about his transition from the Black Panther Party to evangelical Christianity. Cleaver appeared on

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[62] Kenneth L. Woodard, et. al. "Born Again! The Year of the Evangelical," Newsweek, October 25, 1976.
[63] Cleaver, *Soul on Fire*, 230.
[64] Woodard, et. al, 71.

countless major evangelical television shows including, Jim Bakker's PTL Club, Jerry Falwell's Old Time Gospel House, and Pat Robertson's 700 Club to share his conversion story, to promote his crusade ministry, and to continue to secure money for his legal fees from his case in 1968. In 1978, he published his conversion narrative as *Soul on Fire*, and he was profiled in a book by George Otis, a prominent televangelist, who supported Cleaver's work.

George Otis chose to profile Eldridge Cleaver because many evangelicals doubted the sincerity of the former radical's conversion. Otis presented "The New Eldridge," as a loving and affectionate husband and father who wanted to transform his radical passion for fighting against racism into passionately spreading the gospel. The book assures evangelicals that Cleaver was no longer a member of the Black Panther Party, and that God had truly changed Cleaver's heart. Otis's book, *Eldridge Cleaver: Ice and Fire*, along with Cleaver's *Soul on Fire*, served as the inspiration for the film, *The Eldridge Cleaver Story*.[65] The autobiographical film on Cleaver was set to premier at the 35th annual convention of the National Religious Broadcasters, but both Cleaver and his film were dismissed from the conference in 1978.

By 1978, Eldridge Cleaver was not only selling the tale of his conversion. Cleaver was also expanding his theological ability by writing about, "Christlam," in his crusade newsletter. Christlam combined the teachings of Christianity and the Nation of Islam, and he saw his philosophy to continue to engage with Black Muslims. Cleaver was also promoting a new product called, The Cleavers. Eldridge Cleaver believed that regular men's jeans were confining to the black male sex organ, so he designed pants with a special pocket to liberate the organ. *Jet*

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[65] Cleaver's new image also attracted attention from noted journalist, John Oliver. His 1977 work, *Eldridge Cleaver: Reborn* also profiled Cleaver's conversion. However, Oliver's account was for a more general audience, and not strictly for evangelicals as Otis's work was. See John Oliver, *Eldridge Cleaver: Reborn* (Plainfield: Logos International Press, 1977).

Magazine reported on Cleaver's pants in 1978, and in the article, Cleaver defended his pants to Christians by explaining:

> I see no contradictions in what Christ taught and my pants except in the minds of the people who've perverted his teachings. I challenged a group of scholars to show me in the scriptures where what I'm doing is contrary to the teachings of Jesus. What they'll do is to quote some vague passage and then smuggle in their own reactionary opinions.[66]

Cleaver's pants not only got him dismissed from the religious broadcaster's conference, many of his evangelical supporters also began distancing themselves from him. Cleaver's pornographic pants went against the "family values" agenda that characterized evangelical culture and politics of the late 1970s. Cleaver's pants probably did not embarrass God, as Billy Graham warned him not to, but the pants were definitely an embarrassment for those evangelicals who embraced him.

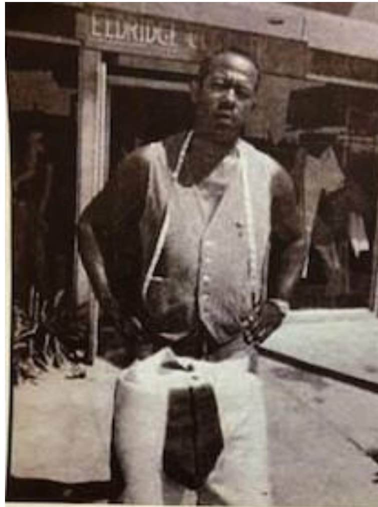

Figure 4.7 "Eldridge Cleaver Designs Pants for Men Only," *Jet Magazine*, September 21, 1978: 22.

[66] "Eldridge Cleaver Designs Pants for Men Only," *Jet Magazine*, September 21, 1978: 22.

In April of 1984, *Christianity Today* featured an article, “Whatever Happened to Eldridge Cleaver?”[67] Written by Randy Frame, the piece reads like a lament as it describes Cleaver’s conversion to evangelical Christianity after a career as a Black Panther. Frame describes how Cleaver quickly rose as an “instant Christian celebrity” in 1976, lecturing widely on how Jesus Christ had changed his life. However, by the early eighties, Frame explains how Cleaver fell “out of favor” with evangelical leaders by marketing jeans that “highlighting the male genitalia organ,” and for “spending time at a Unification Church ranch.” Frame also mentions reports of Cleaver’s attempt to “combine Christianity and Islam” before joining the Mormon Church.

Frame ends the article with an intriguing insight into Cleaver’s fall from evangelical grace. Frame writes:

> Those close to [Eldridge] Cleaver say he probably was exploited, but he has done some exploiting of his own. They maintain a high respect for his intelligence and believe his Christian conversion was genuine. But they say he never matured spiritually because he rejected opportunities to become grounded in the faith…Will the former radical ever be the kind of person evangelicals hoped he would be?[68]

Art De Moss, George Otis, and other white evangelicals who rushed to his side following the news of his conversion definitely exploited Eldridge Cleaver. Cleaver’s conversion to evangelical Christianity affirmed conservative Christian’s arguments against the “counter-cultural movements” of the 1960s and 1970s. That Cleaver, a former high-ranking official in the most visible militant black power organization, renounced radicalism and Communism and embraced Christianity gave validity to their messages of law and order, family values, and free enterprise. Further, I think that white evangelicals believed that Eldridge Cleaver would

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[67] Randy Frame, “Whatever Happened to Eldridge Cleaver: The Radical Black Panther-turned-Christian never found a home in the evangelical world,” *Christianity Today*, April 20, 1984, 38-39.
[68] Frame, 39.

effectively communicate their messages to black communities without becoming "too political" as Tom Skinner had. After all, Cleaver had already been "too political."

In turn, Eldridge Cleaver also exploited white evangelicals' support. White evangelicals helped Cleaver pay his legal fees, supported his crusades so that he could continue earning a living post-exile, and most importantly provided him with an institutional base, something that he lost when he was expelled from the Panthers. Cleaver's identity as a "born again" Christian eventually worked in his favor with respect to his 1968 charges for assaulting police officers. Where other Panthers were sentenced to one-year terms for the role in the shoot-out, Cleaver was sentenced to five-years-probation and 2,000 hours of community service, hours that he undoubtedly earned through his crusade ministry.[69]

Cleaver could not have known what type of support evangelical leaders would provide for him once the news reported on his jail house conversion. However, he knew from the example of Chuck Colson, that converting to Christianity following major trouble with the U.S. legal system, could allow a person to reinvent himself and establish a new platform in society. Colson, a former Nixon aide who served a prison term for his role in Watergate, came out as an evangelical in 1975, wrote a memoir of his conversion, and began a lengthy career in prison ministry. Cleaver watched the Watergate scandal from abroad, and he seems to have followed the example of Colson closely, but actually not as sincerely as some thought.

Cleaver's treatment of women as reported in *Soul on Ice* and in his relationship with his wife, Kathleen, and his history with religion, reveals a little more about my reading of him as insincere and as opportunistic with respect to selling his conversion story. Though Cleaver

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[69] June Cross and Henry Louis Gates., *Leaving Cleaver: Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Remembers Eldridge Cleaver*, DVD, A Basic Black and Frontline Co-Production (Boston: WGHB, 1998).

renounced his life as an "insurrectionary rapist," Cleaver still trampled upon the white man's "system of values" by promoting Christlam while conducting his crusades. This attempt to synthesize Christianity with the Nation of Islam, a religion that was radically opposed to Christianity, showed that Cleaver did not place a premium on the bible as the ultimate spiritual authority in his life, as evangelicals did. From his youth, Cleaver dabbled with a variety of religions, and it seems that he converted to whatever spiritual beliefs and practices that best served his interests at the moment.[70] For example, he converted to Roman Catholicism as a teenager in a Catholic reform school. He never became a member of the Nation of Islam, but he followed NOI members during his multiple prison terms. Finally, he became an evangelical Christian at a moment in U.S. history when evangelicals were making new public identities for themselves after public falls from grace.

Cleaver's attempt to portray himself as an "evangelical family man" ran counter to the fact of who he was as a husband. It was an "open secret" in the Black Panther Party that Eldridge Cleaver beat his wife. Kathleen Cleaver did not agree with Eldridge's conversion to Christianity, but she was baptized with him in Burbank, California in 1976.[71] It is reasonable to assume that she participated in the baptism, and in the crusade ministry, out of fear of her husband. That Kathleen did not support Cleaver's evangelical career is another example of how he used evangelical Christianity to his own personal, entrepreneurial benefit.

Conclusion

These examples from the lives of Tom Skinner, Melvin Banks, and Eldridge Cleaver shows black evangelicals were valuable to evangelical print and pop culture in the seventies.

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[70] Cleaver details his religious experimentation in both *Soul on Ice* and *Soul on Fire*.
[71] See Kathleen Rout, Eldridge Cleaver (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991): 232-233.

Further, these examples the limits of white evangelical support for black brands. Tom Skinner, for example, provided white evangelicals with narratives of how salvation could transform the ghetto. White evangelical presses published his tracts and comic books because they aligned with their beliefs that the systemic issues facing black communities could be solved through salvation. The founding of Melvin Banks's black-owned Christian publishing company shows the extent to which white evangelicals valued doing business with racist white Christians over maintaining a working relationship with a black man. His UMI, Inc. came about because Scripture Press did not want to offend Southern whites by including images of black children in Sunday School materials. Finally, Eldridge Cleaver gave white evangelicals hope. For a brief moment in time, white evangelicals could point to Cleaver as example of conversion's power to change a former radical into a follower of Jesus Christ. However, Cleaver ultimately revealed what the example of Tom Skinner showed us in Chapter 2, white evangelicals have a tolerance for how much of the black experience they will financially support in evangelical culture. Skinner talked too much about social conditions in American inner-cities and racism in American churches, and he lost a great deal of support from many white conservative evangelicals for his ministry. However, in 1978, Cleaver dared to talk about black male sexuality before evangelical audiences by promoting his pants, and he lost all of his support within the evangelical movement within two years of his conversion.

It is unclear what prompted Randy Frame to write his 1984 article piece, "Whatever Happened to Eldridge Cleaver: The Radical Black Panther-turned-Christian never found a home in the evangelical world." However, the title of the piece informs the conclusion section of this study. By 1984, most black evangelicals seem to have fallen off the evangelical scene with respect to writing and publishing works about black identity and evangelical culture. Historical

studies have shown that the black power movement declined as a result of government infiltration of black power organizations. However, what happened to black evangelicals after the black power era? Why did many of them stop their militant demands for an evangelical Christianity that reflected the needs of black people in the U.S.?

Before I attend to these questions in the conclusion, I want to unpack further the topic of black male sexuality and gender expression that has come up throughout this chapter and in previous ones. Chapter 5 will briefly demonstrate how many of these black evangelicals, particularly Tom Skinner, represented of a new expression of "muscular Christianity." Clifford Putney has explained how this term arose in the nineteenth-century to describe how men believed that "bodily strength was a prerequisite for doing good."[72] I am using the term to refer to the "masculine" connotation of "muscular." Black evangelicals, particularly those who responded to the black power movement, were redefining themselves as men who were unapologetically black and unapologetically evangelical.

[72] Clifford Putney, Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 1.

CHAPTER 5

Black Manhood and Evangelical Christianity

"So, I know who I am. I am a black man in whom Jesus Christ is living. A black man with his two feet planted on the earth who has the privilege of having the God of heaven and earth living in him. A black man committed to the black revolution not to negate the existing system but because the black man's cause is a just case, based upon the principles of the Kingdom of God. I am not interested in overthrowing white society any more than I am interested in allowing white society to overthrow black society. I am interested in overthrowing injustice. I am interested in dealing with inequality. I am interested in setting wrongs right. Because those are the principles of the Kingdom of God."[1]

-Tom Skinner, 1970

Black Men, Sexuality, and Evangelical Christianity

Chapters Two, Three, and Four have examined the lives and writings of several black men who worked to confront and correct the problem of racism in evangelical ministries, schools, and businesses during the black power era. With the exception of Eldridge Cleaver, the other men discussed in those chapters were not active members of the civil rights or black power organizations. Therefore, I understand why they have not been considered in the scholarship that considers how gender relations and gender identity informed those movements. However, I engage with several works from that field here to provide an analysis of how black evangelical men who embraced black power engaged with the shifting notions of black racial *and* black gender identities that emerged in that movement.

As I have shown in the previous chapters, black evangelical men developed the same militant approach to American racism as their activist contemporaries. They employed the same language, style of dress, and manner of grooming as their peers in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), and the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP). However, did black evangelical men share the same

[1] Tom Skinner, *How Black is the Gospel?* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1970), 81-82.

ideas about black manhood that emerged in those organizations as they become more radicalized? This is one question that this chapter attempts answer. Other questions follow later.

In many respects, the black evangelical men discussed in this study maintained the same basic ideas about manhood that were typical of black male activists, and of most people living in the U.S. during their generation. Many U.S. citizens, black or white, living during the rights-black power eras associated manhood with a man's status of the head of a household, as the sole or primary wage earner, and as a key player in deciding how his community would be governed at the local, state, and national levels. Yet, many working class black men were prevented from achieving that ideal of manhood due to the systemic structures that limited their access to jobs and political offices. Further, black men had limited access to women, specifically, white women during the period of legal segregation throughout the U.S.[2]

As noted in the previous chapters, black evangelical men were not entirely limited from living out the U.S. American ideal of manhood. Most of them had bachelor's degrees, they worked full-time in evangelical ministries, they supported political campaigns that advanced their values, and they presented themselves as husbands and fathers, who were indeed, the heads of their all-black households. Black evangelical men, like all black men of their era, were viewed by white men as sexual threats. As Tom Skinner once remarked, "Nothing is more disturbing in the white male's mind than the thought of sexual intercourse occurring between black and white people."[3] This quote is significant here because it shows the extent to which Skinner and other

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[2] See Steve Estes, *I Am A Man! Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005) for more on the ideal of American manhood.

[3] Tom Skinner, *If Christ is the Answer, What are the Questions?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973), 169.

black evangelical men had to field questions about whether or not they believed that integration would lead to interracial marriages.

Three of the eight chapters in William Pannell's *My Friend, The Enemy* deal with the topic of race, dating, and integration. In *Black and Free* (1968) and *If Christ is the Answer, What are The Questions?* (1974), Tom Skinner includes the questions he received from white evangelicals on various subjects. Questions on integration and interracial marriage comes up several times in both books, and Skinner includes lengthy responses to those inquiries. In one response, Skinner uses six paragraphs to make his point. Their respective writings show that Pannell and Skinner had very similar thoughts on interracial marriage. Both evangelists criticized whites for believing that black men and women desired sex with white people more than they wanted economic advancement, fair treatment in the courts, and the desegregation of public facilities. Further, both Pannell and Skinner blasted whites for perpetuating dehumanizing sexual myths about black people. They countered that black men and women were human beings who desired meaningful social relationships with other human beings that had nothing to do with sex. They also both challenged that blacks, like whites, tended to marry within their own race because they found members of their own racial groups to be more appealing. Skinner once quipped, "I do not know where white people get the idea that they are so utterly attractive that black people are just dying to marry them."[4] Finally, they both expressed positive hope for black and white people to choose their mates according to the guidance of the "Lord and Master of their lives," Jesus Christ, and not in accommodation of racist mythologies about sex and sexuality that defined black people as brutes and beasts.[5]

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[4] Tom Skinner, "Racism and World Evangelism." Keynote Address, Urbana Conference, 1970. https://mem.intervarsity.org/resources/tom-skinners-urbana-70-address-racism-and-world-evangelism.
[5] Tom Skinner, *Black and Free.* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1968), 144.

That Skinner and Pannell took so much care and concern to address the topics of dating, marriage, and race in their writings has led me to three conclusions. One, I think that they included images and conversations about their wives and children in their writings to assure their largely white audiences that they were married to black women, and therefore, they were not interesting in working in predominately white evangelical ministries to compete for the affections of white women. Further, Skinner and Pannell were not advocating for interracial marriage and romance. For example, Pannell's book includes anecdotes about him and his wife, Hazel, discussing their identity as black people with their young sons, Philip and Peter. Tom Skinner rarely talked about his family in his books and articles. However, the book jacket to his memoir, *Black and Free* and several press releases found among his papers, included a picture of him with his first wife, Barbara and their oldest daughter, Lauren. While Skinner and Pannell preached and provided services to black communities, their written work was largely directed towards whites. This is evidenced in the fact that Pannell's book was commissioned by a white publisher who wanted to release a book on race to his primary audience, white evangelicals.[6] Further, Skinner's inclusion of questions from white evangelicals in his book is another example of whom he was mainly addressing in his writing.

Two, although Skinner and Pannell proudly preached what Skinner has called, "the white man's religion," and they had achieved as much in life, if not more than their white evangelical friends, they were black."[7] Therefore, they were not as viewed as full men in U.S. society *and* by

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[6] Robert Schuster, "Tape 5," February 28, 2000, in *Interviews of William E. Pannell-Collection 498 at Billy Graham Center Archives at Wheaton College*, MP3 audio, 33:11, https://ensemble.wheaton.edu/hapi/v1/contents/permalinks/Dz2e8FCa/view.

[7] Early in his ministry, Tom Skinner frequently described evangelical Christianity as, "the white man's religion." However, this phrase disappears after he rebranded the Harlem Evangelistic Association to the Tom Skinner Associates. For example, Tom Skinner, "I Preach the White Man's Religion," *Christian Life,* July 1966 in Papers of Tom Skinner Collection 430, Box 1, Folder 4. Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton College.

their white evangelical friends. Three, because they were black men, they could never simply be evangelical. Their constant deconstruction of the myth of "Negro sex prowess and white female purity," is yet another example of why Skinner, Pannell, and my other subjects emerged as "black evangelicals."[8]

Black evangelical men created spaces for black evangelicals that affirmed their racial identity and cultural heritage and gave them affirmation of their humanity. Further, black evangelical men used their ministries to provide their constituencies with opportunities to make unique contributions to the "Kingdom of God," or the physical and spiritual community of those who believe in Jesus Christ. Black evangelical ministries, like Tom Skinner Associates, gave many men and women opportunities to express themselves as fully black *and* fully evangelical. I return yet again to Tom Skinner's life and ministry to explore the questions and arguments of this chapter. Tom Skinner not only left behind a host of materials to explore, he also had a profound influence on scores of young people who were trying to reconcile their racial, gender, and religious identities.

Tom Skinner and the Scholarship on Militant Black Manhood

Tom Skinner's rise as the voice of militant black evangelicalism ran parallel to the rise of the militant black power movement. While both movements championed "black pride" and "black power," leaders of the two movements developed diverging ideas about black manhood, maleness, and the role of women in their organizations. Scholarship on gender and the civil rights-black power movements tends to emphasize three major points. One, scholars such as Lance Hill (2004), Akinyele Omowale Umoja (2013), and Charles Cobb (2015) have

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[8] William Pannell, *My Friend, The Enemy*, (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1968), 113.

emphasized the necessity of armed self-defense among certain segments of the civil rights movement. Additionally, biographies of civil rights activists who promoted armed self-defense include Timothy Tyson (1999) and Peniel Joseph (2014). Two, Herman Graham, III (2001), Steve Estes (2005), Simon Wendt (2007) have honed in on how violent and militant, and in some instances, how misogynistic black male activists and soldiers were during the black power era. Three, Danielle McGuire (2010) and Ashley D. Farmer (2017) have written about the unique ways women contributed to the black power movement.

For the purposes of this chapter, I am purposefully only engaging with two scholars mentioned above. One, Peniel Joseph's biography of Stokely Carmichael is important for understanding what I am calling "revolutionary blackness" in this chapter. Carmichael is one of the few black power activists that Tom Skinner cites as an influence on his thinking and preaching. In the next section, I tease out parallels in their biographies to show how they were constructing themselves as young, black militant leaders who were concerned with, and developed ways to the social conditions of black people. Two, Steve Estes's book, *I Am A Man! Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement*, because of his treatment of the BPP. It is evident in Skinner's writings and speeches that he followed the black power movement, and he was particularly knowledgeable about the BPP. Further, as I will demonstrate below, Skinner expressed appreciation for the BPP. However, the main connection between Skinner and leaders of the BPP is that they were influenced by Malcolm X, but in very different ways. This chapter explores those differences.

Steve Estes's depiction of the BPP presents some rather interesting questions about Skinner's construction of himself and of evangelical Christianity as a religion for black

evangelicals. Estes has explained that masculinism is the "opposite of feminism."[9] Where feminism has attempted to upend systems of discrimination, masculinism touts the belief that men are superior to women, and that any man who opposes masculinist rhetoric and strategies is effeminate.[10] Estes goes on to argue that the group most associated with preaching "black pride," the BPP, was also the organization that employed the most "masculinist" rhetoric than any other civil rights group. Further, Estes argues, because of their militant projections of black manhood, the Panthers undermined opportunities to work collaboratively with black women and blacks from the queer community on social and political reform in black communities.[11]

Angela Davis provides additional evidence that supports Estes's claims in her autobiography. In describing some of her former male colleagues in the black power movement, Davis writes, "some black activists…confuse their political activity with their assertion of their maleness…These men view Black women as a threat to their attainment of manhood—especially those Black women who take initiative and work to become leaders in their own right."[12] Many women in the black power movement left organizations because of the attitudes of some black men. Some of the men that Angela Davis refers to in that quote were shaping the militant black manhood that Tom Skinner was engaging with as his constructed his own approach to manhood as a militant black evangelical.

I do not think that Tom Skinner constructed a masculinist identity for himself, although he did buy into, and benefit from, the patriarchal culture of both evangelical Christianity and U.S. society. Skinner's writings, speeches, and sermons do not show that his activism was an

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[9] Steve Estes, *I Am A Man! Race, Manhood, and The Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 7.
[10] Estes, 7.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Angela Davis, *With My Mind on Freedom: An Autobiography* (New York: Bantum Books, 1974),161.

assertion, or even an extension of his maleness, and he did not appear to be threatened by the black women leaders he worked with. The organizational records from the Tom Skinner Association (TSA) show that Skinner and his team worked collaboratively with black women, and to some degree, white women. However, it is clear from his writings and his papers, that the militant black manhood of the black power movement did influence his thinking. Specifically, Tom Skinner was inspired by the work of Stokely Carmichael and Malcolm X.

Therefore, this chapter is concerned with two additional questions. One, how did Tom Skinner reconcile the manhood rhetoric of the black power era with his vision of evangelical Christianity? Two, what were the implications of his presentation of Christ as a "revolutionary," and not a "softy" for the various audiences he was addressing? I show that Skinner's ideas about black humanity were intimately connected to his ideas about the Kingdom of God. In short, Skinner used his identity as a proud black man to promote an ideal evangelical Christian community in the United States that uplifted the concerns of women, immigrant communities, and poor people. By advancing an image of Jesus Christ that was militant and unafraid, Tom Skinner sought to present a "savior" who was masculine and muscular. Skinner's Christ was also attentive and supportive of the needs of all human beings who were oppressed in American society.

After exploring Tom Skinner's association with "revolutionary blackness," the chapter examines how Skinner created images of Jesus Christ that was militant, masculine, but also affirming of freedom and justice for women and immigrants. Ultimately, I conclude that Skinner's approach to preaching and proselytizing allowed him to present evangelical Christianity as compatible with the social revolutions of the seventies. In short, Skinner's Jesus

was a “gutsy, radical revolutionary,” who was “no softy,” and able to relate to militants and moderates.

Skinner and Revolutionary Blackness

After reading Peniel Joseph’s work on Stokely Carmichael, it was difficult to ignore the similarities between Carmichael and Tom Skinner.[13] Tom Skinner was one year younger than Stokely Carmichael, the man who instigated the black power era of the civil rights movement. Further, Skinner had much in common with Carmichael. They both grew up in Harlem. Carmichael’s family immigrated there from Trinidad, while Skinner’s parents hailed from South Carolina. Both Carmichael and Skinner were involved in New York street gangs as adolescents. Further, they were both first-generation college graduates. Their high school and college years were marked by the rise of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King as national leaders for civil rights activism, and by the independence of African countries from European rule. Carmichael and Skinner were able to envision lives for themselves that had more access to social and political freedom and equality than their fathers and grandfathers had. Finally, both men spent their entire adult lives working to bring freedom and equality to black people around the globe.[14] Of course, the two men went about their work in very different ways. However, in many respects, both Tom Skinner and Stokely Carmichael became preachers and spiritual leaders.

When Stokely Carmichael stood in the backwoods of Greenwood, Mississippi in 1966, and proclaimed, “black power,” to a largely black audience of protestors, he was offering them a bold, powerful message that was useful for both their political *and* spiritual needs. He was also

[13] See Peniel E. Joseph, *Stokely: A Life* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2014).
[14] Tom Skinner and Stokely Carmichael also died four years apart from one another. Skinner died from leukemia in 1994 and Carmichael died in 1998 from prostate cancer.

functioning in the same capacity of scores of slave preachers before him, who secretly gathered bondmen and women and exhorted, "You are not niggers! You are not slaves! You are God's children!"[15] Carmichael, of course, preached more publicly, and his message to black people was a more of a directive than an exhortation. Carmichael instructed, "You tell all those white folks in Mississippi that all the scared niggers are dead."[16] With that one statement, Carmichael converted many black Americans into believers in their worth as human beings. Tom Skinner would later praise Stokely Carmichael and other "radical" black activists for their spiritual work among blacks in landmark 1970 Urbana address, "The U.S. Racial Crisis and World Evangelism."

In his speech, Tom Skinner credited Carmichael, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, and H. Rap Brown for accomplishing a task that many white evangelicals never attempted to undertake: encouraging "the black community" to "stand on our own two feet, be men, be proud that black was beautiful and that God could work his life out through our redeemed blackness."[17] Leading up to this quote, Tom Skinner spent the first twenty-nine minutes of his speech explaining how the evangelical church upheld the systems of slavery and segregation in the United States by using the bible to teach that blacks were "cursed" and "relegated to servitude."[18] He admonished white evangelicals for their silence "on the issue of preaching the worth and the dignity of all

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[15] This slave exhortation comes from Howard Thurman's autobiography. He recalls learning about religion and slavery from his maternal grandmother, Nancy Ambrose, a former bondwoman. Thurman's autobiography was published in 1979 by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich in New York. The quote is found on page 21.

[16] Stokely Carmichael's speech during the Meredith March Against Fear is often quoted but given the spontaneous nature in which it was given, there is no complete written copy of it. Media footage of the march remains in existence. This oft-quoted line can be found in a January 15, 1990 article titled, "Review/Television; Recalling the Pursuit of a Still-Elusive Prize" by Walter Goodman. The article was published in the New York Times, and can be found here, https://www.nytimes.com/1990/01/15/arts/review-television-recalling-the-pursuit-of-a-still-elusive-prize.html.

[17] Tom Skinner, "Racism and World Evangelism." Keynote Address, Urbana Conference, 1970. https://mem.intervarsity.org/resources/tom-skinners-urbana-70-address-racism-and-world-evangelism.

[18] Ibid.

men," and then Skinner went about showing how God went about using groups that the evangelicals despised to do the work of spiritual and moral liberation in the U.S. and throughout the world. Skinner's deliberate referencing of black radical men, particularly Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown, who were not religious leaders in the same manner as King or Malcolm X, skillfully presented them as agents of God.

Skinner closed his discussion of Carmichael and Brown by declaring, "God will not be without a witness."[19] This subtle rephrasing of Luke 19:40 is a blatant condemnation of white evangelicals for two of their many failures as Christians.[20] One, Skinner's reconstruction of radical black activists served as a rebuke of white Christians for failing to repent of their degrading beliefs about black people in the U.S. Two, men like Carmichael and Brown were viewed as threats to "law and order" in American society by conservatives, many of whom were also evangelical.[21] Yet, Skinner was able to show that radical black activists were actually more spiritually and morally effective at presenting people with "the good news" than conservative evangelicals were. For Skinner, the gospel message was not simply a matter of a soul being "saved" from hell, but also about deliverance from oppression on earth. The gospel, in Skinner's mind, was ineffective if it did not serve to redeem and uplift the revolutionary blackness that Carmichael and Brown represented. Further, Skinner, by naming these men and boldly holding

[19] Ibid.

[20] The actual words to Acts 14:17 read, "yet he has not left himself without a witness in doing good—giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and fill you with food and your hearts with joy." So, one could say that Skinner is referencing the Acts passage. However, I note here that he is more than likely quoting, Luke 19:40, which reads, "He answered, I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out." In Luke 19, Jesus was responding to religious leaders who demanded that Jesus silence his disciples who were praising him, and not the Roman Emperor, as their political and spiritual leader. Jesus' response suggests that all of creation would praise, or bear witness to his identity. Therefore, I believe that Skinner's suggestion that, "God will not be without a witness," is more likely a rephrasing of Jesus's words.

[21] The catchphrase "law and order" became an integral part of conservative lexicon in the civil rights era to condemn the work of activists who were staging nonviolent protests throughout the South.

them before the predominately-white Urbana audience as models for evangelism, is one way that Skinner embodied revolutionary blackness himself.

Tom Skinner's Urbana address is the only example found among his writings and papers that directly names the activists of his generation with whom he agreed regarding the evolution of ideas about black identity emerging with the black power movement. Though Skinner never directly worked with Stokely Carmichael or H. Rap Brown, he did indeed share in their work of reshaping what it meant to be black in the United States. Skinner, like his contemporaries, was a young man who had become weary with the idea that black people had to address racism in a manner that was acceptable to white people. Stokely Carmichael's cry for "black power" was rooted in his impatience with civil disobedience; he was tired of being beaten and arrested for breaking unjust laws in the Deep South. Tom Skinner's insistence on presenting evangelical Christianity in a manner that was consistent with the social revolution of the 1960s was rooted in his frustration with the racism that he and other blacks were facing in evangelical schools and ministries. This is not only evidenced in the Urbana address, but also in his book, *Words of Revolution: A Call to Involvement in the Real Revolution*. The book was written to provide a "Biblical based" response to address the "tremendous gaps [that] separate the haves from the have nots, the rich from the poor, black from white, young from old, labor from management."[22]

As previous chapters have shown, Tom Skinner used his evangelical association as an organization that embodied many ideals of the black power movement. The Tom Skinner Association, and Tom Skinner's writings, espoused self-determination, political and economic power in black communities, and racial pride. For example, Tom Skinner credits the BPP as a

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[22] Tom Skinner, *Words of Revolution: A Call to Involvement in the Real Revolution* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 13.

"potent movement in their confronting the black community with its need to come together to determine its own future."[23] Tom Skinner took this ideal to heart when he founded his evangelistic ministry to "raise up a whole new generation of Black Christians."[24] Skinner and his team undertook this task because white evangelicals refused to preach in black communities. Therefore, Skinner created offices and ministry programs in the black neighborhoods to be a model of a functioning black organization that was determining its own course independently of the influence of whites.[25]

Though Tom Skinner was not an advocate of armed self-defense as Carmichael and many black power activists were, he understood the necessity of the violence as a response of the oppressed. Skinner's book, *If Christ is the Answer, What Are the Questions?*, is perhaps his most creatively written. It includes sixteen thematic chapters that includes the questions that Skinner has received from people on those themes, and answers to those questions. Skinner not only consults the bible for his answers, but also historical and sociological sources. In the chapter on "Black Power," Skinner answers a question about whether or not the nonviolent philosophy of Martin Luther King, "will prevail and help the Negro attain his place in society." Skinner provides a rather unique answer. He writes:

> If you're concerned about the concept of violence versus nonviolence, that has never really been an issue. Violence and nonviolence are not philosophies but tactics. The tactics I must use must depend on my oppressor. The man who is stepping on me cannot tell me to be nonviolent, because if he continues to kick me and continues to step on me even after I have nonviolently asked him to get off my back, he is forcing me to violence in order to survive. I'm opposed to violence. I hope violence isn't necessary. I call on all people to restrain themselves. But I'm also realistic enough to know that the use of

[23] Tom Skinner, *If Christ is the Answer, What Are the Questions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 171.
[24] An anniversary pamphlet of the TSA expresses its primary desire to develop black Christians for ministry. "Tom Skinner Associates: 15th Anniversary." Papers of Tom Skinner Collection 430, Box 1, Folder 11. Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton College.

[25] The above pamphlet lists various ways the TSA engaged black communities.

> violence or nonviolence is not determined by the oppressed; it is determined by the oppressor.[26]

This passage is significant because it most closely connects Skinner to the aggressive and assertive style that shaped black identity during both the civil rights and black power movements. Though Skinner assures his evangelical audience that he is opposed to violence, the quote demonstrates two things. One, it demonstrates that Skinner understood the general rationale provided by BPP leaders for advocating for violence, or armed self-defense in black communities. For example, Steve Estes quotes a founder of the BPP who rationalized the organization's use of guns in this manner, "The Man is a beast, and he is armed against us. The only thing that will deal with the man is the gun, and men willing to use the gun."[27] Skinner's commentary on violence above shows that he understood that oppressed people tended to respond to violence committed against them, sometimes nonviolently and sometimes violently.

Two, it shows that Skinner understood that the system of racism was maintained through state-sanctioned violence, and in some cases, black people responded to state or police violence by rioting. Skinner, as Chapter 2 shows, used the TSA as a vehicle to respond to riots. His first TSA collaboration with William Pannell in 1968 was in response to a riot that had been precipitated by police brutality. Further, the "Introduction" to his book, *Words of Revolution*, explains, it was written while Tom Skinner was in Chicago. The book was published in 1970, two years after riots erupted there in the wake of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. Skinner notes that the city was "in open rebellion and revolution against the established institutions of our time."[28] What Skinner does not explain was that Mayor Richard Daley

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[26] Tom Skinner, *If Christ is the Answer, What are the Questions?*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974),144.
[27] Estes, 158.
[28] Skinner, *Words of Revolution*, 13.

authorized the police to "shoot to kill…maim or cripple" rioters.[29] Therefore, again, while Skinner was never a proponent of violence, he had intimate knowledge of how black power activists utilized violence to respond to systemic oppression.

Skinner's 1970 Urbana address not only praises Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown for emphasizing dignity in black communities, he also gives credit to "the brothers" for their role in helping blacks to understand their worth. Further, "the brothers" taught black people that they were unified as a race as God's children. Tom Skinner discusses the influence of Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam on his thinking during his childhood in Harlem. Therefore, I am inferring that Skinner is referencing Malcolm X and the NOI in this mention of "the brothers" based on his commentary on them in his memoir, *Black and Free*, which is discussed in Chapter 2. Throughout Malcolm X's autobiography, Malcolm addresses other members of the NOI and other black women and men as "sister" and "brother." For example, when Malcolm's wife is first mentioned in the text, she is referred to as, "Sister Betty."[30] Other members refer to Malcolm as "Minister Brother Malcolm."[31] Yet, the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* does not explain why the NOI used sibling titles. However, there is one clue.

Alex Haley writes, "The black people, God's children, were Gods themselves, Master Fard taught."[32] Fard's teachings shaped the theological and philosophical ideologies of the Nation of Islam. If Malcolm and members of the NOI believed that they were in fact "God's children," then the quote provides a logical explanation for why they addressed each other as

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[29] See James Coates, "Riots following the killing of Martin Luther King, Jr" *Chicago Tribune*, http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/politics/chi-chicagodays-kingriots-story-story.html. Accessed August 7, 2018.
[30] Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X as told to Alex Haley* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999), 231.
[31] Ibid., 231.
[32] Ibid., 211-212.

"brother" or "sister." Tom Skinner's reference to "the brothers" in his Urbana address shows the extent to which Malcolm's influence on the language, rhetorical style, and philosophies were embedded into the revolutionary blackness that defined the black power era this is evidenced by two observations.

One, Skinner's reference to "the brothers," in his Urbana speech shows the extent to which he saw himself as intimately connected to black men who were working to create a sense of unity among black people, and to bring about their liberation from white supremacy. For example, in the same year that he delivered his Urbana speech, Tom Skinner would go on to identify himself as "a black man committed to the black revolution not to negate the existing system but because the black man's cause is a just cause…I am interested in overthrowing injustice. I am interested in dealing with inequality."[33] Skinner clearly saw himself as connected to the revolutionary blackness that the NOI represented. Ultimately, Malcolm X and the NOI were concerned with working to create a sense of unity among black people, and to bring about their liberation from white supremacy.

Two, Malcolm X and the NOI's ideas about the unity of black people not only influenced Tom Skinner, a black evangelical, they also influenced the BPP. While Skinner mostly engaged the BPP when addressing the concerns of white evangelicals over the BPP's influence on their children, Skinner seems to avoid naming the BPP as critical influences on his thinking other than his subtle praise of them for their encouragement of black communities to be self-determining. Still, it is clear that Skinner shared with the leaders of the BPP a deep desire to represent himself

[33] Tom Skinner, *How Black is the Gospel?* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1970), 81-82.

as a black man who was unafraid to examine U.S. institutions, and boldly condemn how those structures enforced the idea that blacks were inferior beings.

Steve Estes's examination of the Panthers emphasizes how the BPP constructed a "masculinist liberation ideology" by encouraging black men to "be men" and "to stand up and be revolutionaries."[34] Further, Estes points to the influence of Malcolm X on the BPP by showing how their idea of black manhood was not only rooted in their willingness to "defend" their communities from police brutality, but also in a desire to "care" for black communities.[35] Estes's points to the free breakfast programs, free health clinics, and other local community services that the BPP offered to black neighborhoods as examples of their care for black communities. Estes argues that the BPP's social services programming allowed them to develop a "progressive political agenda."[36] However, he laments that male leaders in the BPP began using violence to assert their manhood, rather than using their community development programs as the key to their social liberation.[37] For example, he documents several incidences of the BPP's shootouts with police officers as evidence of their "use of violence to achieve manhood." In other words, Estes points out that the BPP took Malcolm's calls for black men to stand up and be men and revolutionaries in their own communities to the extreme.

Steve Estes's comments on the BPP are important for thinking about how Tom Skinner also responded to ideas about militant black manhood that arose in the civil rights-black power era. Tom Skinner also responded to the call for black men to stand up and be brave revolutionaries. However, what separated Tom Skinner from the BPP, Malcolm X, and other

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[34] Steve Estes, 155.
[35] Estes, 171-173.
[36] Estes, 155.
[37] Ibid.

revolutionary black radicals is that he was an evangelical Christian. Further, Tom Skinner was an evangelist, or activist, who spread the Gospel message by writing, speaking, and using a variety of mediums to attract people to his faith. What is clear in his writings and in his papers is that Tom Skinner structured his evangelism efforts around his own embodiment of militant black manhood. For examples, I turn to Skinner's conversion narrative, his theological writing, and finally, his construction of Jesus Christ to show how Skinner presented his faith as relevant for militant black men and for other social revolutionaries.

In *Words of Revolution*, the book Tom Skinner wrote while working with evangelical leaders responded to the Chicago Riot of 1968, Skinner presented himself as a "militant, radical revolutionary" who endeavored to "change the system."[38] However, he distinguished himself from other revolutionaries by stating that he was "God's revolutionary."[39] For Skinner, this meant two things. One, it meant that because God cared about the poor, the hungry, and those who were mistreated in society, that he, Tom Skinner, also cared about those individuals in society and he worked to eradicate the social conditions facing those groups. For example, Skinner's evangelistic association responded to the needs of poor, black communities. He explained, "We have fed the hungry, put clothing on the naked, [and] taught and trained the unskilled…"[40] Two, Skinner's declaration of himself as God's revolutionary was incredibly personal. Skinner saw himself as a revolutionized being. He declared himself as a "black man in whom Jesus Christ was living," or in other words, Skinner was born-again. Chapter 2 has already engaged with Skinner's conversion narrative in his memoir, *Black and Free*. His narrative of his

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[38] Tom Skinner, *Words of Revolution*, 76.
[39] Ibid., 76.
[40] "Tom Skinner Associates: 15th Anniversary." Papers of Tom Skinner Collection 430, Box 1, Folder 11. Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton College.

transition from a Harlem gang leader to an "evangelical" and a "social activist" became the central motif of his ministry.

Throughout Tom Skinner's papers, there are several newspaper articles that emphasize his past as a "gang leader." For example, one headline to a newspaper article reads, "A 'Black Billy Graham,' Ex-gang chief now fights sin."[41] Skinner's past as a former gang member is not only critical for thinking about his conversion, but also for understanding how he was trying to relate to black people who were dealing with police brutality and other manifestations of systemic racism. The above newspaper article quotes Skinner as saying, "anyone not involved in the liberation of oppressed people is not a Christian…you need the bible and social action."[42] Further, Skinner argued, "we have to address ourselves to the question of people in prison because they are black-for lack of legal help, for instance."[43] These quotes demonstrate Skinner's relatability to the black people he presented evangelical Christianity to. Skinner had an intimate knowledge of what it meant to be black and from the ghetto. He understood the social conditions that led to poverty and high rates of incarceration for blacks. Skinner further understood that the systems that defined black neighborhoods as ghettoes, created in black people a deep sense of mental "frustration and bitterness."[44] Skinner used his conversion narrative to show that his faith was capable of saving not only his soul, but also for saving him from a life of mental turmoil and crime. Tom Skinner not only emphasized himself as both evangelical and as a social activist, he presented Jesus as the ultimate social activist, or militant revolutionary.

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[41] James H. Bowman, "A 'Black Billy Graham,' Ex-Gang Chief Now Fights Sin," *Chicago Daily News*. "Tom Skinner Associates: 15th Anniversary." Papers of Tom Skinner Collection 430, Box 1, Folder 4. Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton College.

[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Tom Skinner, *Black and Free* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1968), 16.

Tom Skinner's Militant, Masculine Christ

Tom Skinner had three main audiences that he was evangelizing to in the black power era. For his black audiences, located in urban cities and college campuses, Skinner presented Christ as a figure who was deeply concerned and committed to their struggles for justice and equality. For his white evangelical audiences, Tom Skinner presented Christ as a radical revolutionary who would have opposed racism, poverty, and militarism. Finally, Tom Skinner served as a chaplain for several professional sports teams including, the Washington Redskins and the New York Yankees. This audience required Tom Skinner to present Christ as a physically tough and strong, and as a radical revolutionary.

In article titled, "The Revolutionary God," Tom Skinner explained, "Christ was no softy. He was gutsy, radical, contemporary and revolutionary with hair on his chest and dirt under his fingernails and the guts to face the system and tell it like it was."[45] The article goes on to describe how Jesus, a common, everyday Jewish man overthrew the Roman Empire by establishing a new social order, free of oppression, through his arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection. The brief article concludes with Skinner explaining that Jesus's resurrection provided a new system that worked for all of humanity. It worked because simple belief in Jesus would eliminate all forms of social distinctions, and unite all people under God's kingdom.

Before making this conclusion; however, Tom Skinner provides more evidence of Jesus's revolutionary bravado. He argues:

> If you don't think he was gutsy, then check for yourself how he said certain things. For instance, he stood up and faced the religious establishment of his day and said, "You're a generation of vipers!" He walked into the temple with cords wrapped around his hands,

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[45] Tom Skinner, "The Revolutionary God," *The Christian Athlete*, April 1971, 18.

> and the hucksters in the temple felt the sting of the cords as well as the sting of his words. I suggest to you that Jesus was tough…[46]

Tom Skinner's language here to describe Christ could be read as masculinist by Steve Estes's standards. Skinner was careful to emphasize that Christ was not weak, but rather he was a strong, hardworking, common Jew who was not afraid to confront the social and political leaders of his day. Interestingly, Skinner goes on to say that Jesus did not use "guns, ammunition, or tanks" to bring about his social revolution, but he highlights an incident where Jesus violently confronted established leaders by whipping them with cords. Perhaps, given the context in which Jesus wrapped those cords around his hands, Skinner would rationalize that Jesus was a man who believed in armed self-defense as he was "defending" his "father's house" from the moneylenders.[47] I cannot confirm that this was indeed Tom Skinner's rationale for including that particular story of Jesus Christ in that manner. However, considering Skinner's target audiences, I think that he provided as many examples necessary to show that Jesus went against the status quo to bring about change. This was important point for him to make considering the audiences that he was trying to attract to evangelical Christianity during the time-period he lived in.

Skinner's thinking in "The Revolutionary God" reflects several elements of the militant black manhood that was emerging in the BPP and other sectors of the black power movement. Skinner used some masculinist language to define Jesus. That Skinner's Jesus was "no softy" shows his desire to make Jesus relevant to the black power era. Black power activists like

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[46] Ibid., 18.

[47] Skinner is paraphrasing a story found in all four Gospels in which Jesus becomes angry at the sight of businessmen buying and selling in a temple, rather than using the space for prayer and worship. While none of the scriptures state that Jesus actually physically hit anyone, it is clear that, he "drove" the people and their cattle out of the temple. The stories also state that Jesus physically turned over tables. I believe that Skinner probably saw these actions of Jesus as justifiable violence, or self-defense of the temple.

Malcolm X and Eldridge Cleaver projected themselves and black manhood as strong, brave, and authoritative over their own lives and their communities. Therefore, Skinner's Jesus was a man who did what black radical activists were doing in the black power movement, bringing about a social revolution for all of humanity.

Jesus, Women, and Other Oppressed Groups

While Tom Skinner did utilize some of the masculinist rhetoric of black male revolutionaries, he had a different approach to women in his black evangelical movement than black men did in black power organizations. Women were essential to the TSA. Among Skinner's collected papers, is a pamphlet celebrating the fifteenth anniversary of the founding of the TSA. Women served in a variety of capacities in the organization, including as members of the board of directors. On the one hand, the inclusion of women in the TSA is no different than the inclusion of women as members of the BPP. On the other hand, Tom Skinner's ministry was never blighted by charges of sexism. There is nothing in the sources to show that women were not valued and treated as equals as workers at TSA. For example, young women were encouraged to become leaders of campus ministries, and both black and white women served in a variety of administrative capacities for the organization.[48] However, no women appear to have been recruited and employed as evangelists for the TSA.

Further, Skinner's writings show evidence of his commitment to uplifting the concerns of women as valuable and equal members of society, based upon his conception of the Kingdom of God. In an article titled, "Christ is the Answer," Skinner writes:

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[48] "Tom Skinner Associates: 15th Anniversary." Papers of Tom Skinner Collection 430, Box 1, Folder 11. Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton College.

> Black people are standing up and saying, 'We ain't Negroes, we ain't nugras and nigras and nigroes and colored; we are black'…Women are standing up…The Chicanos are standing up….All the niggers of the society—that is, persons who are looked down upon by other people and who accept other people's definitions of themselves—are getting uppity these days. And the only way to stop being a nigger is to stand up and begin to define yourself as God intends you to be defined, and not on the basis of other people's definition of you.[49]

This quote shows that Tom Skinner was are aware of the women's liberation movement, and he supported women's rights to define themselves in ways that went against traditional views of women. The full quote on women says, "Women are standing up and saying, "We're not sexual objects, we're not playthings, we're not detached individuals; we are persons. And if you want to deal with us, you must deal with us as persons."[50] Ultimately, Skinner is making this point about women, blacks, and Chicanos to show that in the Kingdom of God, all people have equal access to spiritual power through Christ, and therefore, they should have equal social power in America.

By emphasizing Tom Skinner's awareness of women's issues, I do not mean to suggest that his views and treatment of women were better than examples found in the literature on the BPP and women's roles in that organization. However, Tom Skinner's engagement with women through the TSA and his writings were devoid of the extreme masculinist language that conflated his work as an evangelist with his maleness. I do think that Skinner believed that the role of "pastor" and "evangelist" were reserved for men. For example, in some comments on black women in the black church, Tom Skinner noted that, "after the pastor, generally the people who make the church move are the black women."[51] Tom Skinner was a man of his generation, in that he believed that there were roles that men and women could play in religious settings, even as he acknowledged that women were challenging those roles. However, I highly doubt that it ever

[49] Tom Skinner, "Christ is the Answer," The Congregationalist, January 1973, 4.
[50] Ibid., 5.
[51] Tom Skinner, *If Christ is the Answer*, 215.

crossed Tom Skinner's mind to tell women not to sleep with a man who did not convert to evangelical Christianity using vulgar language.

Eldridge Cleaver, who as Minister of Information of the BPP, once told women to use "Pussy Power" against men who refused to join the militant revolution. Cleaver once quipped, "Until he ready to pick up a gun and be a man, don't give him no sugar. I don't know how you can stand have them faggots layin' and suckin' on you. You can always get a real man."[52] This quote is representative of masculinism because in addition to limiting a woman's ability to persuade a man to join the movement to her sex, Cleaver also called men who were not active in black power organizations, "faggots." In other words, Eldridge Cleaver saw non-activist men as effeminate homosexuals, which is absurd. However, the larger point is that there is no such language found in the work of Tom Skinner.[53] However, as the quote from "The Revolutionary God" shows, Tom Skinner did employ some terminology that could be read as masculinist for the sake of evangelizing.

The above quote from Skinner's article "Christ is the Answer" is the only evidence of Skinner's engagement with another race or cultural group. Most of his writing around race relations deals with "blacks" and "whites." However, his brief reference to the Chicano movement shows an effort on his part to think about the expansiveness of the Kingdom of God.

Skinner and the Kingdom of God

Tom Skinner never provides a concrete definition of the "Kingdom of God." However, the phrase comes up quite a bit in his writing and speeches. Sometimes, he capitalized the phrase

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[52] Estes, 165.

[53] In his published and unpublished manuscripts, Tom Skinner did not use derogatory language to describe any group of people.

as evidenced in the opening quote of the chapter. However, he also stylized the phrase using lower-case letters. For example, in *Words of Revolution*, he writes, “Jesus Christ came to break the system and make it work for all men. He came to put in a new system called the kingdom of God. He is truly a radical, a revolutionary concerned about the needs of men.”[54] It is unclear why Skinner chose to stylize the word differently in his writings. However, it is clear that Skinner believed that he was a part of God’s kingdom because Jesus Christ lived in him. Further, it is clear that he believed that anyone who believed in Jesus Christ had Christ living in them, and they were also members of God’s kingdom.

Tom Skinner worked tirelessly to improve race relations between black and white evangelicals because he believed that God’s kingdom could model how U.S. society should function. Essentially, Tom Skinner saw God’s kingdom as one that was concerned “about all the things that it takes to set men free.”[55] For Skinner, soul salvation and social liberation were the basic requirements for making all people in the U.S free.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to show how Tom Skinner responded to the militant black manhood ideologies of the black power movement. Tom Skinner embraced the revolutionary blackness that was expressed in the work, language, and philosophies of Stokely Carmichael and Malcolm X. Tom Skinner embodied revolutionary blackness to attract black radicals, white evangelicals, and other groups to his message by emphasizing his transition from a Harlem gang leader to black evangelical preacher, writer, and activist. He presented himself as a black man who could relate to black people, and who white evangelicals should emulate. Further, Tom

[54] Tom Skinner, *Words of Revolution, 76.*
[55] Ibid., 76.

Skinner constructed a militant, masculine Christ to offer his audiences a figure that was relatable to their causes and social standings. His presentation of Jesus had some of the masculinist language used by black power activists. However, Tom Skinner's evangelical Christian faith allowed him to create a progressive model of evangelical Christianity that acknowledged the humanity of women, black and brown people, and others who were contributing the social and cultural revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s.

By 1979, TSA and the black power movement were on the decline. Where black power activists were living in exile, and in some cases, murdered, Tom Skinner's personal life was in shambles. In 1978, media outlets were reporting on his extramarital affairs, and he seems to have focused more attention on serving as a chaplain to professional sports teams, than on leading the TSA. That Skinner's decline paralleled that waning of the black power movement, just as his rise as the voice of militant black evangelicals mirrored the movement's ascent. The conclusion of this dissertation will attempt to answer one simple question, "What happened?"

CONCLUSION

The Black Evangelical Exodus

"What the WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) church can do is cease to be White Anglo-Saxon Protestant Republican and begin truly to become a community made up of black people, Democrats, Socialists, Republicans, left-wingers and right-wingers. And all must abandon their particular perspectives to begin to get God's perspective. It is unfortunate today that there are large numbers of Christians who honestly believed God has vested himself in the Republican Party."[1]

-Tom Skinner, 1974

"I grieve the arrogance and presumption of "racial reconciliation" work among the diverse peoples of the United States. I believe that the terminology of racial reconciliation is bankrupt. When, in the history of this country, have racial relationships been conciliatory? We need racial righteousness, racial repentance. In this country and many others, we have worked harder to hide the truth about our history than we have to amplify the stories of people who've been wounded by historical lies. Above all, I am grieved by our churches and widespread hypocritical lies."[2]

-Michelle Higgins, 2017

"I cannot identify with much of what evangelicalism identifies with. Yes, I believe Scripture to be the inerrant, inspired, infallible Word of God and all of that, but on the other hand, there's so much baggage that goes along with it…I was very active in the civil rights movement. But when I got saved, I somehow go the subliminal message that I had to leave all of that behind."[3]

-Carl Ellis, 2017

What Happened, Black Evangelicals?

Media reports helped to begin this study. Media reports help to end it. The Introduction of this work engaged with two articles by Tobin Grant, a writer for *Religious News Service*, who reported on InterVarsity Christian Fellowship's triennial student missions conference, Urbana. The conference made headlines in December 2015 for featuring a keynote speaker, Michelle Higgins, a #BlackLivesMatter activist and evangelical preacher. Higgins, like Tom Skinner

[1] Tom Skinner, *If Christ is the Answer, What Are The Questions?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974): 147.
[2] Michelle Higgins, "The Idea of Racial Reconciliation is Bankrupt: White Supremacy, the Church, and How to Move Forward," *Relevant Magazine*, August 29, 2017. https://relevantmagazine.com/article/michelle-higgins-the-idea-of-racial-reconciliation-is-bankrupt/.
[3] Michelle Higgins, "The Idea of Racial Reconciliation is Bankrupt: White Supremacy, the Church, and How to Move Forward," *Relevant Magazine*, August 29, 2017. https://relevantmagazine.com/article/michelle-higgins-the-idea-of-racial-reconciliation-is-bankrupt/.

before her, used the Urbana platform to condemn white evangelicals for not taking a stand against structural racism in American society. The articles by Tobin Grant only captured the highlights of Higgins's appearance at Urbana. However, the pieces do not report on the backlash that both InterVarsity and Michelle Higgins faced. A New York Times article, "Some Evangelicals Struggle with Black Lives Matter Movement," details the gist of the reaction to Higgins's speech.[4] For example, conservative commentators criticized InterVarsity for including a #BLM speaker on the roster instead of granting exhibitor access to a pro-life organization.[5] Michelle Higgins was personally condemned for encouraging evangelical churches to become "political," and for promoting a movement that embraces the experiences of all black people, specifically, black people who do not identify as cisgender and heterosexual.

I included the Michelle Higgins's Urbana story in the Introduction because of its connection to Tom Skinner's life and career. However, Michelle Higgins was not the only black evangelical who was facing criticism for supporting #BLM between 2014 and 2016. The hip-hop artist, Lecrae Moore, arguably the most influential Christian rapper since the inception of the genre, used his social media accounts to denounce the killings of unarmed black people by the police.[6] Essentially, Moore's tweets and posts since the beginning of the #BLM movement draw

[4] Mark Oppenheimer, "Some Evangelicals Struggle with the Black Lives Matter Movement," *The New York Times*, January 22, 2016.

[5] This criticism leveled at InterVarsity is endemic to those who have countered the #BlackLivesMatter movement with chants of "All Lives Matter" or "Blue Lives Matter." Conservative Christians and others who despise #BLM appear to care more about the lives of the unborn than they do about living people who have been unjustly murdered by racist cops and self-proclaimed agents of the law.

[6] Josef Sorett has published extensively on the emergence of Christian rap as a genre. His essay, "It's Not the Beat, But The Word that Sets People Free: Race, Technology, and Theology in the Emergence of Christian Rap Music," traces the genre back to 1985 to the work of rapper-evangelist, Steven Wiley. See Pneuma 33(2011): 200-2017. Lecrae has stood out in the field because of his high degree of lyricism and musical production. While he has maintained a theological, biblical worldview in his music, his fan base has not been limited to churches and Christian communities as most Christians have been since 1985. In 2013, Lecrae became the first Christian rapper to win a Grammy award.

the same conclusion: "true faith stands up for the oppressed and broken."[7] Moore's almost daily posting on the value of black life to God drew him so much criticism from white evangelicals that he decided to "divorce white evangelicalism" in 2016.[8] In a *Christianity Today* piece titled, "The Significance of Lecrae Leaving White Evangelicalism," I was intrigued to find a quote from Carl Ellis. Ellis stood out to me in that article for two reasons. One, as this study explains, Ellis was one of the young black college students who advocated for the inclusion of Tom Skinner as a speaker at the Urbana conference in 1970. Ellis would go on to work for the Tom Skinner Association, and as of 2018, he is a senior fellow at the African American Leadership Institute and a professor at Reformed Theological Seminary. Two, I think Carl Ellis's life and career explains the decline of what I have called and described as militant black evangelicalism in this study.

As I stated in the last chapter, Tom Skinner's rise and fall of the voice of militant black evangelicalism paralleled the rise and fall of the black power movement. Both movements were primarily led by young, black educated men who were concerned with advancing racial pride, dignity, and respect among a group of historically oppressed in the United States, black people. Both groups advocated for historical narratives, music, dress, and grooming that reflected the cultural idiosyncrasies of black people. Tom Skinner's evangelistic association was concerned with attending to the political, social, and economic needs of black communities in the same manner that black power organizations, like the Black Panther Party, were. This was evident in Tom Skinner's support of the evangelical politician, George McGovern's presidential campaign

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[7] See Carol Kuruvilla, "Rapper Has Choice Words for Christians Who Don't Want Him To Talk About Race," The Huffington Post, July 12, 2016. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/lecrae-rapper-christian-black-lives-matter_us_5783ff28e4b0344d51508a2e.

[8] See Note 3.

in 1972, and in the multiple services that his organization provided to black communities in the U.S. and abroad. Tom Skinner and black power activists were dominant players on the American scene in religion and politics from 1966, the date of Stokely Carmichael's infamous black power speech, until about 1978.

While Carmichael and the Black Panthers were faced with in-fighting in their respective organizations, largely brought about by machismo and the FBI's COINTELPRO program, Skinner and other black evangelicals were creating all-black organizations within evangelicalism, but they were also taking steps to promote harmony between blacks and whites through racial reconciliation programming. Historical studies have explained the multiple reasons why the black power movement began to decline after 1978. It is my task in this conclusion to make sense of why militant black evangelicalism also went on the decline after the 1970s. In addition to providing some insight on why I think men like Tom Skinner began to fade away in post-black power America, I also engage with one more article. In March of 2018, Campbell Robertson published a piece in *The New York Times* titled, "A Quiet Exodus: Why Black Worshippers Are Leaving White Evangelical Churches."[9] Why, after so much work on the part of black evangelicals in civil rights-black power eras to advocate for racial reconciliation, are black evangelicals now leaving white evangelicalism?

Before I attempt to make sense of the decline of militant black evangelicals, I must first explain what I mean by the term, "decline." In short, I am arguing that after Tom Skinner and other militant black evangelicals stopped writing about the worth of black identity and the flexibility of the Gospel to affirm black identity, no other black evangelical leader wrote about

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[9] Campbell Robertson, "A Quiet Exodus: Why Black Worshippers Are Leaving White Evangelical Churches," *The New York Times*, March 9, 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/09/us/blacks-evangelical-churches.html.

blackness in the same way. To make sense of the decline of militant black evangelicalism I return to Carl Ellis. Ellis, in some respects, instigated the movement by forcing InterVarsity to deal with its institutional racism. Ellis not only made demands of InterVarsity, he also made a personal commitment to ensure that black college students knew how to apply the Gospel message to their unique social conditions. From 1969 to 1979, he served as the Senior Campus Minister of the Tom Skinner Associates. Ellis went on to serve in a variety of prominent positions in churches and seminaries over the last forty years, which undoubtedly, led to his distinguished current post listed above. Carl Ellis's impressive *curriculum vitae* reminds me of the resumes of civil rights activists like, John Lewis and Andrew Young.

John Lewis and Andrew Young stand out to me because they both worked closely with Martin Luther King, Jr. Young worked with King up until the very moment that he was assassinated; in fact, Young was there on the balcony when the assassin fired the shot. However, since April 4, 1968, Andrew Young and John Lewis appear to have lived very comfortable lives as politicians. It is not my intention to disrespect the social and political work that these men have done to continue to advocate for the rights of black people in this country since King's death. Further, I cannot fathom the psychological devastation that Young, Lewis, and many others must carry with them after enduring and working to abolish the deadly racism of Jim Crow America. However, I do believe that their access to government resources and jobs in the wake of King's murder, is telling of how some radical activists became passive and pacified leaders after the seventies.

In short, I think that many former civil rights activists believed that they could change the political system by running for offices and earning mayoral and congressional seats. Yet, I agree with Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, who asserts that in order for those activists-turned-politicians to

keep those government positions, they began to compromise the lives of black people in favor of colorblind policies that cast racism as a matter of the "past," and not a very real social problem in the present.[10] The triumphant presidential election of Barack H. Obama in 2008 seemed to suggest— to those who wanted to believe— that the problem of racism had been resolved in the twentieth-century. The tragic death of young Trayvon Martin in 2012, and the aftermath of his murder, reminded many people living in the U.S. that legalized, institutional racism remained a problem in the twenty-first century.

As men like John Lewis and Andrew Young became employed by the government—the same government that played a role in Martin Luther King, Jr.'s death—militant black evangelicals also became employed in the evangelical establishment.[11] Tom Skinner's fall as the most prominent and effective black evangelical leader of the seventies largely came about because of his personal conduct. White evangelicals found it easier to dismiss Skinner's challenges to their white privilege and racist behaviors because of his infidelity in his first marriage. Rather than extending forgiveness and reconciliation to him for his human failings as he had extended those same acts of grace to them, racist white evangelicals cast Tom Skinner out of their institutions. However, many of Tom Skinner's co-workers including, William Pannell and Carl Ellis, went on to earn jobs in the very system that turned its back on Tom Skinner.

The opening quote from Ellis explains that the more he became entrenched in evangelical culture, the more he received the subliminal message to distance himself from his activist past.[12]

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[10] See Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor's book, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Chicago: Hay Market Books, 2016).
[11] Tom Jackman, "Who Killed Martin Luther King, Jr.? His Family Believes James Earl Ray Was Framed." *The Washington Post,* March 30, 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/retropolis/wp/2018/03/30/who-killed-martin-luther-king-jr-his-family-believes-james-earl-ray-was-framed/?utm_term=.592a9a9febea.
[12] See Note 3.

Essentially, I think that militant black evangelicalism went on the decline after 1978 because of the complacency and comfort that came with integration into the broader evangelical movement through jobs and other economic opportunities. Instead of emphasizing the significance of black identity, black evangelicals began to emphasize a colorblind approach to racial reconciliation.

The work of Edward Gilbreath and Brenda Salter McNeil shows that black evangelicals continued to denounce the racism of white evangelicals and worked tirelessly to improve relationships between blacks and whites in the movement from the 1980s through the early twentieth-first century.[13] However, after reading the websites of Gilbreath and McNeil, I have concluded that they share much in common with John Perkins and his accommodationist approach to race relations and the evangelical movement. Like, Perkins, Gilbreath and McNeil have made profitable careers out of writing about racial reconciliation. I believe that these activists and writers have good intentions, but black evangelicals, and black people in the U.S., in general, are still facing the hell of institutional racism. Unfortunately, no amount of "loving one's white neighbor" is saving black Americans from "stand your grounds laws," food deserts, mass incarceration, police brutality, and other manifestations of white supremacy. The idea of racial reconciliation within evangelicalism is a noble idea and aim. However, as Michelle Higgins's quote at the beginning of this section suggests, the idea of racial reconciliation is "bankrupt" because there is no effort on the part of white evangelicals to actually address and abandon their racist ideologies and politics.[14]

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[13] Edward Gilbreath's book, *Reconciliation Blues,* has been referenced throughout this study. I mention McNeil here as she has emerged as one of the few black evangelical women who have tackled the subject of race over the last two decades. Her website can be found here, https://www.saltermcneil.com/. Both of these figures have emphasized racial reconciliation as a key to improving racism in the evangelical church, but they lack the prophetic urgency of Tom Skinner.

[14] See Note 2.

Tom Skinner had a prescription for the problem of racism in the evangelical church and in American society in 1974. When he pointed out that white Christians needed to stop believing that God was wedded to the Republican Party in the U.S., and start creating communities that embraced and empowered blacks, women, the poor, and other non-WASP groups, Tom Skinner offered a significant clue for his audiences. In short, I believe that Tom Skinner understood that racism could only change in the U.S. if laws and policies that limited the rights of non-WASP groups were struck down, and laws that were equitable were adopted. Tom Skinner believed that the love of God would influence white Christians to see his point of view; however, he like many black leaders of his generation underestimated white evangelicals' love of white supremacy.

The scholarship of Korie Edwards has shown us that, blacks in the generations after Tom Skinner discovered various ways in which white evangelicals maintained a love of power and dominance. Edwards's 2009 sociological study, *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches* argues that interracial churches exist first and foremost to make white evangelicals comfortable by not advocating for racial justice and equality.[15] The experience of black evangelicals in interracial churches that Edwards recounts in her book were no different than the experience of Clarence Hilliard, whose life and career was explored in Chapter 3. However, where Hilliard was expelled from the interracial Christian community he collaborated with in 1973 to help bring about racial reconciliation, black Christians today are exiting those churches in droves.

A Quiet, Yet Highly-Publicized Exodus

[15] See Korie Edwards, *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Scholars have shown us how significant evangelical Christians were to the presidential election of Ronald Reagan. Further, the 2016 presidential election reminded the country of just how politically powerful white evangelicals are. Over 81% of white evangelicals voted for a virulently racist business executive, who they believed God was using to strike down the efforts of President Barack Obama to make America great and safe for people who are not cisgender and heterosexual. Further, it is clear from the work of Carol Anderson that many white evangelicals voted for the Forty-Fifth President of the United States because of their rage over black progress in this country.[16] White evangelicals' votes earned them their white supremacist President, but it is costing them their congregants.

The examples of the rapper, Lecrae Moore and the *New York Times* article, "A Quiet Exodus: Why Black Worshippers Are Leaving Black Churches," demonstrate that black evangelicals are starting to see and understand that white evangelicals do not care about justice and equality. This was not their concern in the civil rights-black power eras of American history, and this was their concern during the burgeoning #BlackLivesMatter movement. Whiteness is their politics. Whiteness is their religion. Whiteness is the only American identity that matters to them. Therefore, whiteness is creating an exodus of black believers from evangelical churches and institutions. Perhaps, the only hope for blacks who continue to believe as evangelicals do, in conversion, biblical authority, crucicentrism, and activism, is to return to the way of Tom Skinner, William Bentley, and Melvin Banks. Skinner, Bentley, and Banks built all-black evangelical institutions to attend to the soul salvation of black communities. At the same time,

[16] See Carol Anderson, *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016).

those men preached prophetic messages to whites that, if applied, could bring about the evangelical ideal of God's Kingdom reigning on Earth, as they believe it is in Heaven.

Final Thoughts

I began *Soul Salvation, Social Liberation* with the goal of addressing three questions: 1. What role has race played in the proliferation of evangelical Christianity in postwar America? 2. Within the diverse histories of Christianity in the U.S., how do we distinguish black evangelicals from more well-known black preachers, theologians, and activists? 3. How have black evangelicals shaped and reshaped ideologies about the categories of race, religion, and nation? I also intended for this study to have a significant impact on the fields of American religious history, particularly those focused on evangelical history, on African American studies, and on women's and gender studies. In this final section, I reflect upon how this study has attended to those questions and has contributed to those fields.

This dissertation has shown that race has shaped the proliferation of evangelical in postwar America in three distinct ways. First, my analysis of the current state of the scholarship on evangelical Christianity has shown that the religion is essentially a belief system that supports and maintains white supremacy in America. Scholars such as Darren Dochuk, David Swartz, Frances Fitzgerald, and others have consistently shown that evangelical Christianity was proliferated by men and women who supported national political policies that ignored the concerns of the poor, black and brown people, women, and a host of other individuals who did not identify as white, wealthy, heterosexual, American-born, and Christian. Further, this scholarship has shown how white evangelicals have deemed individuals who have advocated for

the human and civil rights of those aforementioned groups as, "un-Christian" and "un-American."[17]

Second, my engagement with the primary sources of self-proclaimed black evangelicals has shown how the emerging and developing ideas about black identity that emerged in the black power movement became useful to those black individuals who believed in evangelical religion as defined by D. W. Bebbington. Tom Skinner, William Pannell, and the other men discussed in these chapters experienced "born again" conversion, believed in the infallibility of the bible, viewed the crucifixion as a the ultimate reconciliatory act between God and humans, and became activists to spread the Gospel message. Their activism was shaped by their belief that evangelical Christianity—"the white man's religion"—could address the spiritual and the material needs of black people in the United States. I have shown that their theological writings are rife with examples of how they reinterpreted evangelical Christianity to show that Jesus had more in common with the oppressed than he did with oppressors. Furthermore, black evangelicals preached those New Testament scriptures that affirmed that for those who believed in Jesus Christ, American racial hierarchies no longer applied to them because they were all spiritually equal children of God.

Finally, this study has shown how the project of "racial reconciliation" in the evangelical movement has been doomed since it started. Even before the fall of Jim Crow, whites and blacks comingled together in evangelical bible schools and ministries. However, these acts of integration had two very different meanings for whites and blacks. On the one hand, black

[17] Tom Skinner and William Pannell frequently defended civil rights workers as being more Christian and more American than white evangelicals who supported segregation in the American south. For example, William Pannell declared that he was "more grateful to SNCC than to Southern Baptists" for advocating for his rights as a black man who frequently visited southern states in his book, *My Friend, The Enemy* (Waco: Word Books, 1968), 95.

evangelicals sought to work and worship with whites because they believed that they were equal spiritually. Further, they believed that their collaborative relationships with whites could model fairness and egalitarianism for the broader American society. On the other hand, white evangelicals believed that they had to be socially relevant in a progressively integrated America. Therefore, they invited black people into their ministries to be present, but white evangelicals did not conceded any power or authority for blacks to be active participants in those organizations. As black evangelicals became increasingly dismayed at the opportunity to work on equal footing with whites in ministries, they created their own separate ministries that attempted to address the social and spiritual concerns of black people in the U.S. Their institutions emerged around the same time that the black power movement began influencing national conversations on race and rights.

Black evangelicals distinguished themselves from other Christians who were responding to the social issues that defined the American scene during the black power era in two distinct ways. First, they distinguished themselves from white evangelicals by embracing their identity as proud, black men. Tom Skinner, Columbus Salley, and Clarence Hilliard studied black history and culture. They infused evangelical Christianity with the tradition of black prophetic preaching, and with the cool, street style of dress and grooming and the hip, soulful language that resonated with every day, common black people. Further, as stated throughout this study, they attempted to mold their religion to become anti-racist. Secondly, these men distinguished themselves from other black Christians by producing theological writings on the black power movement that affirmed the tenets of evangelical Christianity. Whereas black Christians such as James Cone and Albert Cleage preached that the black experience was a sufficient starting point for ascertaining theological truths, black evangelicals countered that the bible should be the

primary basis for doing theological work. Finally, these men were distinguished from activists such as Martin Luther King, Jr., in that the majority of them were not active in demonstrations against unjust laws. Their activism was preaching and writing to encourage conversion to evangelical Christianity, as they understood it as black men in America.

My engagement with the work of black evangelicals in the black power movement has led me to conclude that these men, particularly Tom Skinner, was determined to show that evangelical Christianity was not as myopic as white evangelicals presented. Skinner showed that the religion affirmed the worth and significance of black identity in America. Further, he made the case that the religion could address the societal concerns facing black people in the U.S. in the sixties and seventies. As America was becoming an increasingly integrated society along racial lines, Tom Skinner saw evangelical Christianity as a religion that could facilitate interracial harmony and economic justice.

Overall, this study has created several new conversations to consider in evangelical studies, African American studies, and women's and gender studies. This dissertation is a fine example of the African proverb popularized by the Nigerian novelist, Chinua Achebe. In a 1994 interview, Achebe, speaking about "the danger of not having your own studies," explained:

> There is that great proverb—that until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter. That did not come to me until much later. Once I realized that I had to be a writer. I had to be that historian. It's not one man's job. It's not one person's job. But it is something that we all must do, so that the story of the hunt will also reflect the agony, the travail—the bravery, even, of the lions.[18]

White men and a few white women historians have dominated the current scholarship on evangelical history in the United States, and they have told the story of that movement from the

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[18] Jerome Brooks, "Chinua Achebe, The Art of Fiction, No. 139," *The Paris Review* 133 (1994). The article is located at https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1720/chinua-achebe-the-art-of-fiction-no-139-chinua-achebe.

perspective of the hunters. In other words, their stories of the movement privilege the voices of the white men and women who created schools and businesses, amassed fortunes, and used their wealth and influence to create a powerful political base for the Republican Party. This study, *Soul Salvation, Social Liberation*, privileges the voices of those individuals of those who have been silenced by white supremacy and white privilege. This dissertation shows that black people were not only present in evangelicalism in the sixties and seventies; they were active contributors to the movement by writing books, and founding publishing houses and evangelistic associations.

Further, I have demonstrated that black evangelical Christians are important subjects to study for a different understanding of African American Christianity during the black power era. Black evangelicals made valuable theological contributions to the burgeoning field of black theology that emerged in the work of James Cone and Albert Cleage during the civil rights-black power periods. Their creation of a pro-black biblical hermeneutic and practice allowed them to explain evangelical Christianity's utility for black people seeking to fully exercise their political and economic rights. Additionally, I think it is significant that black evangelicals mostly engaged with the New Testament in their theological writings.

Historically, enslaved black people were taught their social condition was justified because of how slave masters interpreted the teachings of the epistles attributed to the Apostle Paul. As an act of resistance against Pauline scriptures, many black leaders of the nineteenth-century preached from the Exodus narrative and from the Hebrew Prophets to call for the deliverance of black people from social oppression in America. The Exodus and the Hebrew Prophets also influenced the preaching of twentieth-century black leaders, including, Martin

Luther King, Jr.[19] However, what is seen in the writing of black evangelicals is a reclaiming of the New Testament as a vital source to justify recognition of the dignity, freedom, and equality of black people at the height of the black power movement. That black evangelicals related to black power on their own terms not only has relevancy for conversations in African American Christianity, but also for the conversations that are developing in the field of black power studies. As mentioned in the Introduction and Chapter 1, Peniel E. Joseph, the founder of that particular field issued a call for projects that probed the intersections of black power and black churches. While Joseph's understanding of "black churches" appears to be limited to those institutions associated with historic black denominational life, this study shows conservative black Christians operating in evangelical ministries were influenced by black power.

Finally, this dissertation is useful for conversations on black manhood in the civil rights era. Most of the historiography considers the relationship between black men and violence as a way of understanding how black men asserted themselves as men who were fully capable of governing themselves as individuals, their families, and their communities. The scholarship tends to consider the "gendered legacies" of self-defense and nonviolence, or it examines how black male veterans shaped the political scene of their hometowns after returning from war.[20] This work has shown that black evangelicals used the language and ideas from black power to present themselves and Jesus of the Gospels as "radical revolutionaries" who were "down" with the

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[19] See Eddie Glaude's *Exodus! Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth Century Black America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000) for stories about black religious leaders during the antebellum and postbellum periods.

[20] I am borrowing the term, "gendered legacies," from an article by Traci West titled, "Gendered Legacies of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Leadership," *Theology Today* 65 (2008): 41-56. I think the term is applicable to studies on the civil rights and black power movements that consider how gender and sexuality informed those movements. For examples, see the work of Peter Ling and Sharon Montieth (1999), Danielle McGuire (2010), or Ashley Farmer (2017). Studies on the black men, manhood, and war include articles by Herman Graham (2001) and Simon Wendt (2007).

struggle to attain social, political, and economic rights for black people. This was evident in Tom Skinner's comic book presentation of himself as the "evangelical John Shaft." This was evident in Clarence Hilliard's depiction of Jesus as a "funky revolutionary." This was evident in Columbus Salley's declaration that the God of evangelicals was "too white."

Further, because of their evangelical worldview—their belief that all people were spiritually equal before God—black evangelicals concerned themselves with the plight of immigrants, women, and poor people of all races and cultures. They presented their religion as one that was relevant to black male revolutionaries like Huey Newton, but also as one that fully affirmed individuals who did not necessarily conform to the masculine ideals of the black power movement. For black evangelicals, evangelical Christianity made room for all oppressed individuals seeking to declare their human rights in American society.

I hope that this work can be useful for conversations in the above academic fields. Further, I intend for this work to be useful for those black evangelicals who are leaving evangelical churches. I wonder if they know about the work of the black evangelical men, I have written about in this study. Perhaps, if they knew more about the work of Tom Skinner and Columbus Salley, or if they began to follow the work of Michelle Higgins, they might become creative. It is my desire that contemporary self-proclaimed black evangelicals who read this work will become inspired to write new black evangelical theological books and organize new black evangelical ministries that can rescue evangelical Christianity from its longstanding reputation as the religion of white American racists and their sympathizers.

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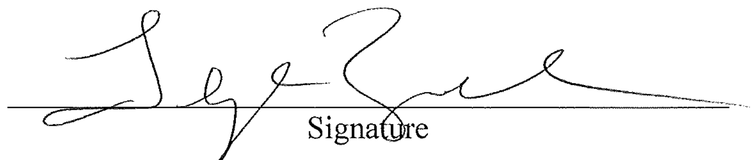

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