

Lancaster Theological Seminary

Addressing the Wounds of Racism Through the Lens of Moral Injury:

A Qualitative Study Drawing on Black Liberation

And Womanist Theology

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by

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Addressing the Wounds of Racism Through the Lens of Moral Injury
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ABSTRACT

Although Black Liberation and Womanist Theologies have unlocked a profound conversation on praxis for oppressed people, they have not included, in large measure, the guidance to be gained from an intersection with Moral Injury Theory. An argument is presented, the purpose of which is to show how Black Liberation Theology enhances Moral Injury Theory and how Moral Injury Theory provides tools for addressing the effects of racism. In so doing, the concept of moral injury strengthens Black Liberation Theology by expanding its resolve to serve within communities affected by racism and indeed with all humanity. In addition, the theology of liberation may provide support for the spiritual attempt to encourage sufferers of moral injury through transcendent concepts such as forgiveness, reconciliation, and perhaps even atonement. This project also provides pastors, chaplains, and others with the kind of understandings and motivations that will assist them in meeting the needs of parishioners who may be struggling with the despair of the hidden wounds of racism that display the symptoms of moral injury.

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Chapter 1

Racism is “a latent social hate-filled cancer”¹

On an exceptionally cold, afternoon in January, I disembarked from an Avianca aircraft into a winter coat waiting for me and a new life in the United States of America. It is hard to say when the weight of the history of race in America engulfed me like hot lava from an angry volcano. The trouble with racism, I found, is that it can be extremely subtle, exceedingly unrestrained, or uninhibitedly denied. Furthermore, racism is ubiquitous. Racism permeates all of society such that an encyclopedia may show articles on anything from racism in art to racism in zoos.

I learned in my new life in America, and quickly so, that racism is an emotional construct that affects the moral grounds on which minorities, upon whom it is practiced, encounter more often than not, doubt, despair, anger, rage, and a loss of feelings of self-worth. In one instance, I wrote answers to questions on a college essay examination and received an A+. I did not think my answers were worth that grade because, even though I had some good prose, I did not truly answer the question fully. This was a fault of which I was aware. Nevertheless, the professor lauded me in front of the class and spent a great deal of the hour reading my work to my classmates. Many would remark on hearing this story that I should have been pleased. For me, however, it was a clear sign that I was not expected to be able to write even a simple sentence and that having written a whole essay was enough to catapult me to a penultimate place in the pantheon of my race.

¹ “MTP Archives: MLK on Racism as a ‘Hate-Filled Cancer,’” NBC News, accessed August 1, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/meet-the-press/video/mtp-archives-mlk-on-racism-as-a-hate-filled-cancer-45349955966>.

While William Shockley,² Arthur Jensen³ and more recently, Dr. James Watson⁴ provide so-called scientific evidence and otherwise speak of the intellectual inferiority of black people in relation to whites, Asians, and others, I would argue that, notwithstanding the flaws of their work, they reveal the temperament of the nation and the racism that is a part of its DNA. Shockley and Watson are Nobel Prize winners, the first for the transistor and the second for the double helix structure of the DNA molecule. Both therefore have made incredible contributions to the world. Just imagine how far we have come because of the transistor and the human genome. Racism is not an academic matter, however, as many objectors to Shockley and Jensen and Watson protest, in the sense that it conforms not the least to scientific study and reasoned logic.

As a biology major in undergraduate school, this amazing black writer—so described by a professor, in one case received a “D” in freshman English and in another moment was advised to drop thoughts of medical school because of it. From a speech professor, I also received a low grade, and yet another thought so much of my speech-making proclivity that he recommended me for the job of pageboy at Radio City Music Hall in New York City. The problem with that endorsement was that I am black. After applying, I was ushered into the plush office of a CEO, submerged in a much-too-deep leather sofa, and greeted with warm smiles and then questions of my true purpose. “Are you here to test us”? they inquired, thinking I might be there as a Trojan Horse like sycophant of the NAACP desiring to attack and bring charges from within. Who gets to be interviewed by the CEO of a large enterprise for the job of a page? Being but eighteen

² William Shockley, “Dysgenics, Geneticity, Raceology: A Challenge to the Intellectual Responsibility of Educators,” *The Phi Delta Kappan* 53, no. 5 (1972): 297–307, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20373194>.

³ Arthur Jensen, “How Much Can We Boost IQ and Scholastic Achievement,” *Harvard Educational Review* 39, no. 1 (April 1, 1969): 1–123, <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.39.1.l3u15956627424k7>.

⁴ Mark Mannucci, *American Masters: Decoding Watson*, American Masters PBS, January 2019. accessed February 3, 2019, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/american-masters-decoding-watson-full-film/10923/>.

years old at the time, I obsequiously demurred and agreed to return and try again after graduation from college despite the fact that other pages were undergraduates.

One never knows unequivocally if a situation is normal or if it is racist. On one occasion, I needed money to replace the roof of my home that I owned free and clear. I had considerably more money than needed in the bank (that I did not wish to use), so I asked for a loan. After having been told the loan officer was on vacation and given other excuses, I demanded a response to my loan request and was told that the money would not be given to me. Instead, I was asked to employ a contractor who would submit bills to the bank for payment. I was told that this is normal procedure—but is it? It is covert racism that festers but makes no cry of pain. White students in my university regularly questioned me on whether I was qualified to teach them and if my doctorate is real or just a useless result of Affirmative Action. A few demanded to see my credentials—not unlike the demands of Donald Trump to procure the birth certificate of President Barak Obama. Their parents, in addition, often requested they drop my course and enroll in another section with a professor who more nearly reflected their mien. These examples of encounters can be readily dismissed as life events, supporting the notion of how insidious talking about or observing racism is and can become.

Far more sinister and morally disruptive is the history in which I did not participate but which affects me as transgenerational trauma. It is the history of slavery, as black bodies torn from the shores of Africa were corralled in ships across oceans into the welcoming arms of the West Indies and Americas. Being considered nonhuman—more akin to monkeys—and worthy only of the work of beasts of burden, a consciousness of inferiority developed that stripped self-confidence and worth, while layering a legacy of subservience and self-hate. In North America the institution of slavery morphed into the stresses of the Civil War, Emancipation,

Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and the demand for Civil Rights. In those periods, most egregious was the menace of lynching—murder most obscene—and the denial of the basic human needs of liberty and self-actualization. Unrestrained lynching of black men and women culled thousands of white men, women, and children from their homes to watch with opprobrious laughter and delight—as people do in stadiums, signaling the acceptance by all of the inferiority of those then called negroes. In consideration of their attitudes, biases, fear of black bodies, and belief in their superiority over others, whites have precipitated the realities of economic, educational, cultural, systemic, and institutional racism.

Racism

The term, “racism” is not an easy one to define. There can be no doubt that human beings are complex entities. Often, we think that what we believe is exactly what everyone else should believe. It is self-evident, however, that we are marked indelibly by our different experiences and memories. Herein lies misunderstandings of the volatile term “racism.” Yet another part of the difficulty of definition lies in the fact that many exemplars of racism in America have been declared illegal so that it has gone underground so to speak. It is also axiomatic that the term is so abhorred that no one admits to it, and any conversation on it is choked as if it has atrophied.

According to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL),

Racism is the belief that a particular race is superior or inferior to another, that a person’s social and moral traits are predetermined by his or her inborn biological characteristics.

Racial separatism is the belief, most of the time based on racism, that different races should remain segregated and apart from one another.⁵

⁵ “Racism,” Anti-Defamation League, accessed June 13, 2018, <https://www.adl.org/racism>.

Expanding further on the term, it is valuable to note the definition from a dictionary of theological terms which explains that racism constitutes, “incidental as well as systematic practices of discrimination, oppression, and domination on the basis of race. It is considered within Christian ethics to be sinful and evil behavior.”⁶ It should not go unnoticed that the very attempt to define the term tends to appear to soften its felt effects somewhat. The attempt, however, valiant to define racism cognitively, ignores the very important dimension of the emotional outcomes to which it unabashedly adheres.

As recipients of the effects of racism, blacks often have a different understanding of its precipitating events than do whites. There can be little, if any doubt however, that the horrific lynching murder of James Byrd Jr. in Jasper Texas, at about 2:00 am on June 7, 1998 was due to racism.⁷ According to the story, three white men offered a ride in the back of their pick-up truck to a black man James Byrd, who was walking very early that morning in Jasper. One of the white men sported tattoos telling of his prison life and Aryan pride. He also had tattoos depicting a Confederate flag, Nazi-type SS lightning bolts, and a black man hanging from a tree. Another, also an ex-convict, had tattoos showing allegiance to the Ku Klux Klan-connected Confederate Knights of America. In June 2018, twenty years after the incident, John Savage in a *Pacific Standard* publication stated,

The two white men beat Byrd without mercy, viciously kicking him in the head and torso. Brewer grabbed a can of black paint from the truck and sprayed it in Byrd's face.

The men ripped down Byrd's pants and underwear. They grabbed a logging chain. King said, court records would later reveal, that this is what they did in the old days to “niggers

⁶Donald K. McKim, “racism,” in *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms, Second Edition: Revised and Expanded* (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014). 230.

⁷ John Savage, “The Shocking Legacy of America's Worst Modern-Day Lynching,” *Pacific Standard*, June 7, 2018, <https://psmag.com/social-justice/the-shocking-legacy-of-americas-worst-modern-day-lynching>

who messed with white women.” The men chained Byrd by his ankles to the pick-up and dragged him three miles, tearing him to shreds. Byrd tried to protect his head by propping himself up on his elbows, which were later discovered ground to the bone.⁸

Because of the obviously odious nature of the offense there was initial agreement by the citizens of Jasper, both black and white, that race was a motivational factor for the crime. The sheriff of Jasper testified in court that when he originally observed the extended crime scene, he, “... knew somebody had been murdered because he was black.” “I thought that was a hate crime,”⁹ he said.

However, as time has gone by, memories have become blurred and the divisions between the races have proliferated to the extent that some whites take exception to what they once believed. Cassy Burleson, a journalism faculty member at Baylor University is quoted in the article by Savage, suggesting that, in regard to racial feelings much has changed, and not for the better, in the twenty years since the dragging incident. Burleson argues that, "There is a racial polarization that has occurred—not just in Jasper but across the country. It's been going on for a few years, and it really accelerated with the election of Trump. That polarization might be giving some white people permission to deny the true motive behind the dragging death of Byrd.”

As a black man, I can imagine, and I can feel the deleterious effect this heinous diabolical crime had then and has now on the black citizens of not only Jasper, and Texas, but also this nation and the world. In addition, I do not have a change of mind over the passage of time about the crime. From the beginning I have known that there can be no hesitation whatsoever in accepting the reality of racist actions, and that there is no justification for acts of violence and hate against others because of the color of their skin. By way of example in the case of the

⁸ Savage, “Shocking Legacy.”

⁹ Savage, “Shocking Legacy.”

shooting of Botham Shem Jean in Dallas Texas,¹⁰ a majority of blacks have no doubt that racism was involved while others insist it was simply an unfortunate accident. According to several news reports a white police officer claimed that she entered Mr. Jean's apartment having mistaken it for her own. Assuming he was a burglar somehow, Mr. Jean alone at home was fatally wounded as the officer fired her gun at him. Confrontations such as this one contributes to the anguish of the black community leaving the group and the individuals within it to suffer the symptoms and wounds of moral injury. Even in the absence of critical details there is a unified dread that there is a preponderance of evidence that life is stacked against the community to the extent that a sense of brokenness prevails. Occasions multiply, leading to cases of disparate understandings of what constitutes racism.

Having participated in many discussions on what constitutes racism I can attest that in fact, a multitude of disagreements exist. It is important to take this detail into consideration if the argument is to be made that racism is extensive in the lives of blacks. If there is no agreement on what establishes racism some may well insist that it only takes place on rare occasions if at all. I take the view that it is indeed pervasive. It may not occur as prescribed in some well-defined archive or canon. It may not occur at the water fountain or in busses and trains; it might not take the form of discrimination as with housing and religious beliefs, but it grinds perniciously nonetheless, into the very soul of its victims.

These transgressions have produced in individuals and in the assemblage of black people an internalized racism characterized by trauma, loss of hope, despair, moral turpitude, and acts of violence against oneself and others. The pain of the inability to respond out of fear and lack of

¹⁰ P.R. Lockhart, "The Ongoing Controversy around a Black Man Killed by Police in His Own Home, Explained." Vox, September 14, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/explainers/2018/9/14/17858528/botham-shem-jean-dallas-shooting-apartment-amber-guyger-police>.

standing has made for grievous anguish and moral dissonance.

Moral Injury

The construct known as Moral Injury is relatively new. It has evolved from the work of several people who were listening to the stories of and treating combat soldiers for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). “But as clergy and good clinicians have listened to more stories like these, they have heard a new narrative, one that signals changes to the brain along with what in less spiritually challenged times might be called a shadow on the soul.”¹¹ The narratives heard, presented as injuries of a moral nature. There is evidence that moral injury has been in existence for a very long time. In fact, there are many examples of it in biblical stories, not only as understood by Christians and Jewish adherents, but also by Muslims and other religious entities.¹² Did Abraham look upon the order from God to sacrifice his son as a contortion of his moral self? Brendan Case suggests that “For Kierkegaard, the binding of Isaac requires Abraham to set aside his moral convictions...”¹³ To set aside one’s moral convictions is to compromise oneself in debilitating ways. With its naming moral injury has become visible and is receiving a significant amount of academic attention coupled with practical efforts towards mitigating its effects through spiritual and other means.

There are many definitions of moral injury perhaps because the field of study has only recently been opened and there is yet to be one and only one agreed upon description. Joseph McDonald offers the following definition:

¹¹ Tony Dokoupil, “A New Theory of PTSD and Veterans: Moral Injury,” *Newsweek*, December 3, 2012, <https://www.newsweek.com/new-theory-ptsd-and-veterans-moral-injury-63539>.

¹² Joseph McDonald, ed., *Exploring Moral Injury in Sacred Texts*, Studies in Religion and Theology (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley, 2017).

¹³ Brendan Case, “The Binding of Isaac | Second Paradise,” accessed January 24, 2019, <https://secondparadise.wordpress.com/2010/02/03/the-binding-of-isaac/>.

Moral injury results from the violation of a human being's core moral convictions. It can damage good character and wreck personal moral identity and beliefs, generating feelings of meaninglessness, guilt, shame, and despair that may lead to inner anguish, alienation, addiction, self-harm, and suicide.¹⁴

This definition is worthy of adoption in this project because it is chosen from the editor of a text that discusses moral injury from the perspective of some of the sacred texts not only representative of Judaism and Christianity, not only from Islam and Buddhism, but also including United States civil religion.¹⁵ In so doing, McDonald calls for “a capacious definition of moral injury that admits the possibility of multiple causes and agents of injury, and recognizes that these can interact and feed off each other in complicated ways in an individual's continuing experience.”¹⁶ This parenetic definition lends itself to a multidimensional understanding that is inclusive of military, non-military and other prerogatives making it thereby, pertinent for this project. Furthermore, The Shay Moral Injury Center asserts in consideration of moral injury that,

In essence it is a wound to the conscience. However, it is not just military members that can experience this. And what is this? It is soul anguish, a broken spirit, a shredded soul. Anyone who works with marginalized, at-risk populations has probably seen that empty stare that can be moral injury. People in poverty. People struggling with addiction. People whose daily lives and their choices erode their feeling of being a good and decent person, worthy of respect. People who carry unprocessed grief and guilt in ordinary life. People with stressful life-and-death type situational jobs such as police officers, doctors and

¹⁴ McDonald, *Exploring Moral Injury in Sacred Texts*, 13.

¹⁵ McDonald, *Exploring Moral Injury in Sacred Texts*, 13.

¹⁶ McDonald, *Exploring Moral Injury in Sacred Texts*, 19.

nurses. Because of things we do, witness, are ordered to do, or fail to do in high stakes situations. We can lose our moral foundations and our sense of being a good person.¹⁷

Current work on moral injury suggests that the freedom to be encountered by attention to its presence lies in efforts towards fixing, as it were, the victim. To be clear, what is learned from the application of military escapades to Moral Injury is that the solution lies often in convincing the troops that how they act, horrible as it may seem, is done for the greater good. Would the world universal say yes to actually eliminating war entirely so as to end moral injuries in the military domain? Can societies be asked to end objectification in all its forms, and would they respond positively? In addition, increasing attention is being given to the spiritual dimensions of the means to assuage moral injury within and without the military. It is a difficult task to identify someone who genuinely confirms that she or he fully supports the murder of others. I wonder what it means if absolutely no one is a warmonger how it is possible that it exists.

The military services, not surprisingly, are reluctant to discuss moral injury, as it goes to the heart of military operations and the nature of war. The Army is producing new training videos aimed at preparing soldiers to absorb moral shocks long enough to keep them in the fight. But the Pentagon does not formally recognize moral injury, and the Navy refuses to use the term, referring instead to “inner conflict.”¹⁸

Failure to admit compliance with the destruction of other humans and its resultant moral injury is a protective mechanism practiced by many to maintain their sense of worth and humanity.

Failure to recognize and address moral injury in the military is to perpetuate the need for bodies who fight ostensibly for God and country.

¹⁷ “Moral Injury: A Struggle with Identity and Meaning | Volunteers of America,” Volunteers of America: National, accessed March 2, 2019, <https://www.voa.org/moral-injury>.

¹⁸ David Wood, “Moral Injury: Healing: Can We Treat Moral Wounds?,” *The Huffington Post*, March 20, 2014, <http://projects.huffingtonpost.com/projects/moral-injury/healing>.

Racism as Moral Injury

I have previously illustrated that racism persists within the American society. I have also made the case that the concept of moral injury is prevalent in the military and a cause for concern. In reflecting on the matter of racism, it makes sense to me that what black people have been through for generations is indeed a form of moral injury. Racism decimates social trust even as does the vagaries of war.

Whenever there is a conversation on race and racism in America the dialog often resorts to the perils that obtain because of it. Racism is unequivocally evidenced by the trail of harm it leaves behind. Until the trial is over, and facts revealed I cannot categorically state that the killing of a black security guard by a white policeman near a Chicago bar in November 2018 was due to racism. Yet in my gut I know that, most likely had he been white Jemel Roberson, the security guard, would not have been killed. He was holding a suspect on the ground with a knee and a gun in the accused's back.¹⁹ Witnesses claimed that the people observing the scene shouted to the newly arriving officers that Roberson was a security guard, nevertheless one policeman shot him. In a National Public Radio Program 1A, which aired on Wednesday January 2nd, 2019, the question, *“Does The ‘Good Guy With A Gun’ Tagline Work If That Guy Is Black?”*²⁰ was raised. In answer, program participants made clear the fear and insecurity black people feel even when they have a legal permit to carry a weapon. Most black callers into the program, insisted that they would never leave home with a gun even if permitted by law. I submit that a moral injury occurs here and in similar instances when we are unable to do what is right and legal

¹⁹ Emily Sullivan, “Police Fatally Shoot Black Security Guard Who Detained Shooting Suspect, National Public Radio, November 13, 2018.” <https://www.npr.org/2018/11/13/667252788/police-fatally-shoot-black-security-guard-who-detained-suspected-shooter>.

²⁰ “Does The ‘Good Guy With A Gun’ Tagline Work If That Guy Is Black?,” National Public Radio: 1A. podcast audio, January 2, 2019, <https://the1a.org/shows/2019-01-02/does-the-good-guy-with-a-gun-tagline-work-if-that-guy-is-black>.

because in so doing, we might suffer the consequences of exactly what possession of a weapon should curtail. This assertion will become clearer as the next section is perused.

I began to come to grips slowly with the horrific tragedy that was so much in our hearts and minds in June of 2015, when nine black people were killed by a young white man at a church in Charleston, North Carolina.²¹ He was welcomed into the church by unsuspecting bible study attendees and then he used a gun to take their lives. The picture came into view like an old treasured movie, of the epic story of the Trojan horse. Closing my eyes, I could see in my mind's eye the Trojans opening wide the gates to welcome in a wooden horse they believed to be a gift, the fruit of a battle won. And so, the horse enters into the compound and the people rejoice but then just as they celebrate in their new found treasure out of its bowels come danger and destruction from men with weapons.

In Charleston North Carolina the people opened wide the door of Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church to receive what they believed to be a gift, the joy and privilege of having a visitor come in to receive the good news of the unending love, grace, mercy, and truth of almighty God. I can imagine, hear, and feel the love of the women and men gathered in that sanctuary, that sacred space as they welcomed Dylann Roof. Speculating, I can hear Sylvia Johnson say, "Sit over here close to us,". "Do you want something to drink sonny? Oh, you want to sit by the pastor. Here Tywanza," a young man just five years older than Roof, "pull up a chair so the youngster can sit next to pastor Pinckney." There are other pastors in the room and Susie Jackson an 87-year-old woman still singing on the choir asks, "sweetie what's your name? You live around here? It's God's work for sure that you have come in here to join us. All the time

²¹ Jason Horowitz, Nick Corasaniti, and Ashley Southall, "Nine Killed in Shooting at Black Church in Charleston," *The New York Times*, June 17, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/18/us/church-attacked-in-charleston-south-carolina.html>.

God is good, and God is good all the time. We are so glad to have you.” Rev. George McCain nods his head in agreement with a knowing smile. Cynthia Hurd the librarian, reaches for a bible making sure the welcomed visitor has the good book in his hands. Myra Thompson the bible study leader for the evening calls out the chosen bible passage to him and helps him find the place within the thin pages. The Rev. Depayne Middleton-Doctor a school administrator, goes over to see that all is well by straightening up the cookies and drinks on the side table ready to serve. Sharonda Singleton is there wondering if she might have had the visitor in class but no, he is not from her school district and Ethel Lance gets ready to ask the question she had begun to ask when the once welcomed interruption began. The study resumes from where it left off with attempts from the leader to bring the visitor up to speed. And so, the gathering continues focused on God, and focused on seeking to accommodate and set a feeling of belonging to the new inquirer. Suddenly without a warning hatred and anger come tumbling down letting the foul stench of murder create havoc from the mouth of a gun and the mouth of a demon possessed self-proclaimed racist man shooting again and again. Bringing death to nine of those who so assiduously set about growing with Roof yet closer to God and sharing God’s word with him.

Purpose and Assumptions

It is to this wider spectrum of the presence of moral injury that this project is addressed. It is the purpose and intent of this project to explore the extent to which the trauma resulting from racism is a form of Moral Injury to be added to the growing field. It is my contention that with African Americans in and outside of military involvement, they encounter additional incidences of stress as a result of pernicious racism. Furthermore, that racism touches them deeply in their souls. Dona Marimba Richards asserts that, “It was “soul” that was traumatized by slavery and the sudden imposition of New Europe. It was “soul” that revitalized itself and survived through

its connection with the universal African soul.²² Fielding speaks of a creative soul force²³ and a culture force²⁴ that is the essential black consciousness. When they are compromised, it is my conjecture that a serious harm obtains, akin to extreme moral injury.

It is because of the debilitating injuries experienced by human beings, God's children, that the need arises to name them as moral injuries and to address the hurt theologically, through the Christian hermeneutics of Black Liberation Theology and Womanist corollaries. The trauma Mr. Byrd's family and friends endured requires serious attention if we do intend to live together socially, psychologically, and spiritually. In fact, my understanding of moral injury and racism, with respect to this project, is based on my theological understanding of what it is to be human and how we identify what wounds humanity.

This project assumes that moral injury requires a spiritual rather than a strictly psychological approach to its alleviation. The assumption is based on the observation that much of the literature indicates that Moral Injury ought to be isolated from the longer standing notions of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The means to assist sufferers who exhibit the symptoms of PTSD it appears, is firmly placed within the purview of psychologists and psychiatrists. With the drawing-out and establishment of Moral Injury as worthy of exploration, it appears that what is needed for redress lies more properly in the realm of spirituality, thereby instigating a conversation with clergy and those who have knowledge about forgiveness and other religious doctrines. Understanding the relationship of moral injury to the soul as promoted by Larry Kent Graham, is to be reminded,

²² Dona Marimba Richards, *Let the Circle Be Unbroken: The Implications of African Spirituality in the Diaspora* (Trenton NJ.: Red Sea Press, 1989) 36, quoted in Carlyle Fielding Stewart, *Black Spirituality and Black Consciousness: Soul, Culture and Freedom in the African-American Experience* (Trenton NJ.: Africa World Press, 1999) 3.

²³ Carlyle Fielding Stewart, *Black Spirituality and Black Consciousness: Soul, Culture and Freedom in the African-American Experience* (Trenton NJ.: Africa World Press, 1999), 2.

²⁴ Stewart, *Black Spirituality and Black Consciousness*, 105.

that the soul is an integrative process at the center of persons and communities. The soul is the integrating center of awareness, meaning, and value of the cumulative pain, joy, pleasure, and sensibilities of the human body and the body politic. It is the site of our deepest pain and our most sacred aspirations and values. Moral injury breaks apart its wholeness and stains its purity.²⁵

These observations on the presence of the soul in humans highlight the extent to which in all of life there is an important necessity that particular attention be paid to the serious harm that obtains from its damage.

Christianity and, specifically, Black Liberation Theology describes God in whom forgiveness, freedom and reconciliation is given to all who call on God for help in the name of Jesus Christ who specifically engages with the oppressed. I shall argue that by critiquing Black Liberation Theology to a better expression and recognizing its own hermeneutic, womanist thinkers add their own unique voice to a possible spirituality of healing for moral injury. Womanist Theology emerged from the articulation of Black Liberation Theology. In so doing it has enhanced its predecessor by widening the scope that is covered. In current society, there is concern for diversity and inclusion within relationships and Womanist Theology adds to Black Liberation Theology the consideration of sexism and classism to the causes of struggle experienced by the oppressed, poor and marginalized. This introduction of intersectionality will help in the understanding of the meanings of the subjects addressed.

Turning again to a theological dictionary the definition of black theology is, “A twentieth-century North American theological movement. It interprets Scripture and the Christian gospel from the context of the oppression of black people engaged in the struggle for

²⁵ Larry Graham, *Moral Injury: Restoring Wounded Souls* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2017), 79.

spiritual, social, economic, and political liberation.”²⁶ It states further, that liberation theologies are, “Various 20th century theological movements which see the gospel as liberation from all forms of oppression-economic, spiritual, political, and social. The emphasis is on “praxis,” or the practical ways in which God’s call for the liberation of the oppressed is accomplished.”²⁷

Another definition useful to this project is a statement by the National Association of Black Churchmen and quoted in Cone and Wilmore.²⁸ The definition claims that,

“Black Theology is a theology of black liberation. It seeks to plumb the black condition in the light of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, so that the black community can see that the gospel is commensurate with the achievement of black humanity. Black Theology is a theology of ‘blackness.’ It is the affirmation of black humanity that emancipates black people from white racism, thus providing authentic freedom for both white and black people. It affirms the humanity of white people in that it says No to the encroachment of white oppression.”²⁹

In this project, essential pieces of each definition above relevant to an understanding of the topics addressed, will be utilized.

Womanist theology, according to one source, “... is a religious conceptual framework which reconsiders and revises the traditions, practices, scriptures, and biblical interpretation with a special lens to empower and liberate African-American women in America.”³⁰ A more in-depth

²⁶McKim, “black theology,” in *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*. 31.

²⁷McKim Donald, “liberation theologies,” in *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 160.

²⁸James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, eds., *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, vol. 1, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 38.

²⁹ Edward Antonio, “Black Theology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, ed. Christopher Rowland, (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 81-104.

³⁰C. T. I. Reviews, *Comparing Religions, Coming to Terms: Philosophy, Philosophy* (Cram101 Textbook Reviews, 2016).

definition comes from Emilie Townes a professor and Dean of the Divinity school at Vanderbilt University. Dr. Townes offers that,

“WOMANIST THEOLOGY is a form of reflection that places the religious and moral perspectives of Black women at the center of its method. Issues of class, gender (including sex, sexism, sexuality, and sexual exploitation), and race are seen as theological problems. Womanist theology takes old (traditional) religious language and symbols and gives them new (more diverse and complex) meaning...”³¹

This latter definition will be of primary use throughout this project, because Emilie Townes is a pioneering scholar in womanist theology and her delineation includes matters of sexism, class, and gender, all of which can be linked to the effects of racism.

Methodology

This project comes under the rubric of analytical essay. This means that an argument is presented, the purpose of which is to show how Black Liberation Theology enhances Moral Injury and how Moral Injury provides tools for addressing the effects of racism. In it I will endeavor, in the field of theology, to faithfully represent the positions of James Cone, Delores Williams, and Emilie Townes. In the field of moral injury, I will present findings by those in the arenas of veterans’ affairs, psychology, and religion. Having detailed the facts, I will connect them in a logical fashion and attempt to reach conclusions that are not solely my own previous decisions but that emanate from the facts as described. To accomplish this task, I will engage, the aforementioned scholars and supporting literature from others. In addition, I will involve the literature on Moral Injury both from a military and a civilian platform.

³¹ Emilie Townes, “Womanist Theology,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 57, no. 3-4, (August 11, 2016): 159-76.

Furthermore, in this project I shall argue that racism has placed a tremendous burden on those who have been oppressed by it. Black people have and are suffering their own unabridged edition of moral injuries. I shall maintain that while it is a singular precipitating factor, racism may not produce the levels of observed trauma analogous to that which combat veterans encounter. Nevertheless, racism presents itself within the etiology of moral injury and results in parallel burdens. Moreover, I shall assert that because of our commitment to and belief in religion generally, and particularly in Christianity, our search for meaning, strength, and existence has elicited the formation of a Black Liberation Theology. I will contend that the exigent demands of the hundreds of years post-slavery, a time period Joy DeGruy posits as covering an epoch of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome,³² arrived at a Kairos moment in the 1960's when the Black Liberation Theology was launched. Additionally, the consequences of the Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome are inherited by subsequent generations such that the injuries, the wounds, the trauma, the anomie persist since they have neither been treated sufficiently nor healed.

In considering the effects of racism upon those who were ripped from the fabric of their habitats on the continent of Africa and sown into the patchwork of the Americas, I speak now of one realization. That is that the pernicious effects of racism are described herein with the expressed desire to show how deleterious it has been and is for black people. However, as I do so whether from a subjective or objective stance, I cannot escape the corollary that racism has seriously wounded the perpetrators themselves and indeed their descendants who consciously or unconsciously suffer, it may be argued, their own moral injury.

In his autobiography Nelson Mandela informs us thusly,

³² Joy Angela Degruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing* (Portland, OR: joy degruy publications inc, 2005).

I knew as well as anything that the oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed...I am not truly free if I am taking someone else's freedom just as surely as my freedom is taken away from me. The oppressed and the oppressor are alike robbed of their humanity...When I walked out of prison that was my mission—to liberate the oppressed and the oppressor both.³³

Reflection on the subjects covered in this project will lead to conversation on current conditions within the black community and the perception whites have of that community. If Cornell West is right in asserting that,

these demons are at work, the demons of meaninglessness, of hopelessness, a sense of nothingness conjoined with the institutional and structural marginalization of large numbers of black...But for the most part, it has produced the highest level of self-destruction known to black people since we arrived,³⁴

then perhaps contemplating that the demons are manifested through moral injury may support a cure. Some whites may take this issue stated by West as fodder to show that the ills black people face is of their own making or that they have a natural propensity to suffer meaninglessness and the like. I would argue they are neither more likely nor less likely to be prone to self-destruction than any other peoples.

Claims and Reasons

Although Black Liberation Theology has unlocked a profound conversation on praxis³⁵ for oppressed people, it has not included, in large measure, the guidance to be gained from its intersection with Moral Injury theory.

³³ Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela*. (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1995). 544.

³⁴ Cornel West, *Prophetic Thought in Postmodern Times*. Monroe: Common Courage Press, 1993), 150-151.

³⁵ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, (New York: Continuum, 1993), 126.

In the sense that moral injury is the result of incidents of stress, trauma and feelings of anguish, grief, and guilt, Liberation Theology presents itself as remedy because it acts in response to Moral Injury Theory.³⁶ A second consideration is that both Black Liberation Theology and Moral Injury speak to a theological understanding of what it is to be human, and how we identify what wounds humanity. In other words, both raise questions about theodicy or how notions about God relate to and interact with justice. That racism conflates a host of intemperate maladies is not subject to debate, and it is tenable that moral injury be placed within the boundaries of those disorders. In so doing the concept of moral injury may strengthen Black Liberation Theology by expanding its resolve to serve within communities.

It has been my experience that the collision of what one believes to be right and what one has to do that is wrong in one's eyes is stressful and enervating. During the war in Vietnam, I served as an airman at an Air Force Base in South Korea. A fellow airman was assigned to guard loaded F-102 aircraft ready for deployment to Vietnam. This assignment troubled him dearly as he wanted nothing to do with possible harm to others, and he was physically ill upon serving overnight. His failure to function and his protests caused him to be sent to a psychiatrist, and subsequently, he was discharged as unfit for service. I now recall our discussions and, I can now begin to appreciate the place of his moral dilemma. In my mind, the response of the Air Force may have been the wrong solution to an ill-defined problem. In this, other militarily associated incidents, and in civilian life there is room for the consideration of a theological response. This is so because of the presence of the contemplation of what is right and what is wrong, and the consequences of decisions that are contrarian.

³⁶ In consideration of the need to distinguish moral injury the trauma, from Moral Injury the theory, the former is expressed in lower case and the latter in uppercase representation.

Significance

It would be of special significance to be able to link Moral Injury, Black Liberation Theology and Womanist Ethics and Theology to further the conversation and understanding of each, separately and together. In the first place, I find it compelling and worthy of study to take two seemingly disparate subjects and uncover ways in which they may be linked as an enterprising exercise. Secondly, the literature does not reveal that this has been done with Moral Injury and Black Liberation Theology or Womanist Ethics. To do so would fill a gap in the exploration of the stated phenomena. Thirdly, this project will extend the notion that Black Liberation Theology though viewed as pertaining only to one race of persons by many, is actually concerned indeed with all humanity. As James Cone postulates, “Being black in America has little to do with skin color. Being black means that your heart, your soul, your mind, and your body are where the dispossessed are.”³⁷ In addition, the theology of liberation may provide support for the spiritual attempt to encourage sufferers of moral injury through transcendent concepts such as forgiveness, reconciliation and perhaps even atonement.

Black Liberation Theology has gained tremendous clarity from contributions provided by the field of feminism as embraced by womanists that will situate this project in a more inclusive location than might otherwise obtain.

Finally, the conduct and completion of this project will provide pastors, chaplains, and others with the kind of understandings and motivations that will assist them in meeting the needs of parishioners who may be struggling with the despair of hidden wounds that display the symptoms of moral injury.

Project Outline

³⁷ James H. Cone, *Black Theology & Black Power*, (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1997). 151.

In this first chapter I have provided a brief overview of some of what black people have gone through at the hands of whites in America. It has been argued that the concept of Moral Injury ought not be subject only to considerations of military personnel but be applied also to civilians. I contend that the experiences of blacks today reflect behaviors and social conditions that are symptomatic of Moral Injury. I mention current definitions of Moral Injury, racism, Black Liberation and Womanist Theology because my argument is that looking through the lens of Moral Injury, we can see its presence in black people as a result of racism.

In Chapter two I will present Moral Injury Theory and argue for its application beyond the military domain. I shall begin with a discussion of the place of Moral Injury in its origins within the military exigencies of war, then describe examples of its possible manifestations absent its placement in the military domain.

Black Liberation and Womanist Theology is engaged in Chapter three with an eye towards showing how they both respond to the wounds of racism and what they provide towards the healing of those wounds.

Chapter four presents stories and observations that build upon and illustrate the racial trauma and moral injury depicted in chapter three.

In the final chapter, the case is made that the moral injury suffered by black people has a distinct spiritual component that is being addressed by Black Liberation Theology. There is current agreement that Moral Injury may be best addressed through spiritual balms as opposed to psychological or other means.

Chapter 2

Moral Injury

As we connect Moral Injury with racism, this chapter will describe some existing insights gleaned from the stories of ex-combat warriors about the scourge they encountered in military settings. Beginning with stress. Following that, I will take the discussion out of the realm of the military as sole proprietor and place it into a more universal setting.

Herein, it my desire that the point be made that Moral Injury is birthed in the family of the military and has become tethered to the family of civilians. In addition, I shall examine how moral injury is a spiritual wound requiring a theological understanding (conceptually) and a pastoral response (practically). The possibility of the epigenetic transference of moral injury is a compelling question that is also covered as it has the potential of extending the effect of moral injuries across generations of families and individuals.

To accomplish the above, there are several questions that emerge when considering Moral Injury. Some of them are explored in this chapter as follows. The reader may ask whether the duplication of the construct of Moral Injury beyond wartime experiences is tenable, therefore a response will be proffered. Additionally, the reader may wonder whether moral injury could be passed down through generations as a function of heredity and that question is addressed. Oftentimes there is a question about to whom moral injury is properly assigned: does it occur on the part of the offender, the recipient, or both? This too is investigated as well as the question of the relationship between theology and moral injury.

Stress and its Prevalence

It would be rude to approach a stranger and to inquire about his or her own personal problems. Nonetheless, if we did, we might find in an honest answer, that our lives today are bombarded

with stressors and with struggles to flourish. Mindfulness and stress-reducing books and programs proliferate in society. Coupled with the need to find ways to be happy, which might be understood as the absence of unbridled and undesirable stress, there is yoga and a host of other methods of stress reduction that dominate advertisements, television programs, places of education, and doctors' offices. There are even available adult coloring books. An investigation of what does not bring about stress may yield a much shorter list.

A visit to Questia³⁸ reveals a brief listing of the following topics with regard to the military. Stress Management, Military Families and Stress, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD, PTSS), Meditation, Leisure and Recreation, Teenagers and Stress, Anxiety in Children, Test Anxiety, Anxiety Disorders and Insomnia. As can be seen the short list would also apply to non-military situations and both would include a host of others from the death of loved ones and divorce to the vagaries of writer's block. The failure to deal with and assuage all of these stress producers can be extremely detrimental to humans.

Moral Injury as a construct holds hands with and is a partner of stress in that stress is defined as, "A state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances."³⁹ Military personnel while studying the effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) found that pilots of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) were subject to similar stresses as was occasioned in those who faced the enemy face-to-face. One study on the finding concluded in part that, "While (it) this may not neatly fit the concept of PTSD, it is consistent with the idea that existential threat and moral injury may cause lasting harm to UAV pilots."⁴⁰

³⁸ "Military Families and Stress: Selected Full-Text Books and Articles," Questia, accessed January 21, 2019, <https://www.questia.com/library/history/military-history/military-and-society/military-families-and-stress>.

³⁹ "Stress," Oxford Dictionaries, accessed March 7, 2019, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/stress>.

⁴⁰ Michael D. Matthews, "Stress among UAV Operators – Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Existential Crisis, or Moral Injury?," *Ethics and Armed Forces*, vol. 1 (2014), <http://www.ethikundmilitaer.de/en/full-issues/20141-drones/matthews-stress-among-uav-operators-posttraumatic-stress-disorder-existential-crisis-or-moral-injury/>.

From this result, and others I maintain that no view of moral injury is sufficient absent the consideration of stress.

The surfacing of stressors indicates the tension that leads to social and psychological maladies. Moral Injury as a construct holds hands with and is a partner of stress in that stress is defined as, “A state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances.”⁴¹ Military personnel while studying the effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) found that pilots of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) were subject to similar stresses as was occasioned in those who faced the enemy face-to-face. One study on the finding concluded in part that, “While (it) this may not neatly fit the concept of PTSD, it is consistent with the idea that existential threat and moral injury may cause lasting harm to UAV pilots.”⁴² From this result, and others I maintain that no view of moral injury is sufficient absent the consideration of stress.

Could it be that many of the stressors experienced in and out of the military are the result of a moral injury?

Stress in Soldiers and Moral Injury

I have been moved and troubled by the existing stories told by veterans of war about their undeniably horrifically stressful experiences, things seen, things done, things avoided. Often actions taken or not taken that have led to crippling conduct, have been precipitated by way of direct command from superiors or from necessities of the moment. Military comportment requires that soldiers perform as directed but that they may refuse to carry out unethical or illegal

⁴¹ “Stress” Oxford Dictionaries,, accessed March 7, 2019, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/stress>.

⁴² Michael D. Matthews, “Stress among UAV Operators – Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Existential Crisis, or Moral Injury?,” *Ethics and Armed Forces*, MARCH 2007, accessed March 6 2019. <http://www.ethikundmilitaer.de/en/full-issues/20141-drones/matthews-stress-among-uav-operators-posttraumatic-stress-disorder-existential-crisis-or-moral-injury/>.

orders. They then, especially while at war, are placed between Scylla and Charybdis. In *Morality and Moral Injury*, Kent D. Drescher et al. postulate that, “Moral Injury describes the effects of acts of commission or omission in war that result in mental, emotional, and spiritual struggle.”⁴³ Consider the situation where a soldier faces a threatening situation in the exercise of battle and has to make a split-second decision whether to shoot to kill or refrain. By way of example, on November 21, in 2012 Neal Conan, host of NPR’s Talk of The Nation, interviewed three pioneers in the construct of Moral Injury by presenting an understanding and portrayal of moral injury.⁴⁴ The segment opened with the first guest **Tyler Boudreau**, who is the author of *Packing Inferno: The Unmaking of a Marine*.⁴⁵ Boudreau retired as an officer with the United States Marines and chronicles his story of disillusionment with the Corps, not only in his book but also in lectures and invited presentations. At the time of the publication of his book in 2008, he had not heard of the term Moral Injury because even to that point the difficulties soldiers of war suffered were termed Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or *battle fatigue* or *shell shock* or something else. Boudreau opined that moral injury from his perspective is a social concern rather than strictly a psychological one. In that sense, it is not only about going against one’s moral beliefs but also contradicting societal mores.

In dealing with their pain veterans have presented poignant expressions through poems, prose and puns. HC Palmer has written the following poetic story.

After War A Six-Word Story

⁴³Kent D. Drescher, Jason A Nieuwsma, and Pamela Swales, “Morality and Moral Injury: Insights from Theology and Health Science,” *Reflective Practice: Spirituality in Formation and Supervision*, 33 (2013): 51, <http://journals.sfu.ca/rpfs/index.php/rpfs/article/viewFile/262/261><http://journals.sfu.ca/rpfs/index.php/rpfs/article/viewFile/262/261>.

⁴⁴ Neil Conan, “Moral Injury: The Psychological Wounds Of War,” National Public Radio: Talk of The Nation, audio file, November 21, 2012, <https://www.npr.org/2012/11/21/165663154/moral-injury-the-psychological-wounds-of-war>.

⁴⁵ Tyler E. Boudreau, *Packing Inferno: The Unmaking of a Marine*, 1st edition (Port Townsend: Feral House, 2008).

I'M HOME ALIVE. Well, not really.⁴⁶

Here Palmer is describing the melancholy reality of his coming home. He has survived war and is pleased to shout out that he has slipped its surly bonds and is not deceased. Truly, that is something to celebrate, and yet within his life, within his soul he writhes, for he feels he is worse off than in battle and, in a sense, has died to living well.

An anonymous soldier wrote after he had been ordered to kill and found out he had murdered fishermen and children rather than decimating enemy combatants,

I became a fucking animal. . . Y'know, I wanted-. They wanted a fucking hero, so I gave it to them. They wanted a fucking body count, so I gave it them a body count. I hope they're fucking happy. But they don't have to live with it. I do.⁴⁷

In addition to the difficulties suffered, the warrior also had to contend with receiving a medal for a high body count he knew was morally and otherwise undeserved. His anger, his rage, his discomposure is palpable as is his pain and call for redemption and forgiveness.

Chris Antal, in conducting healing worship services with veterans reports on hearing the following partial story from one attendee.

The infantry sergeant confessed about the Vietnamese women brought out “to the field” where they were sexually assaulted by the soldiers under his command. “She was begging me to stop. There was a line of people behind me. I let it go on.” The infantry

⁴⁶ Robert Emmet Meagher and D. A. Pryer, eds. *War and Moral Injury: A Reader*, (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2018), Kindle edition, chap. 2.

⁴⁷ Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*. New York: Scribner, 2003, 83.

sergeant, who had been in a leadership position responsible for the lives of soldiers in his squad, attributed the deaths of others to things he did and failed to do.⁴⁸

In his affirmation, “I let it go on,” I can sense the agony, the declaration of personally pleading guilty to a crime and the disbelief that he has done what he believed he would never do.

Rory Fanning who completed two deployments to Afghanistan with the 2nd Army Ranger Battalion, and walked across the United States for the Pat Tillman Foundation in 2008–2009 wrote,

I’m here in Chicago, 7,000 miles and 15 years away from Jalalabad, a desolate town in southwestern Afghanistan. Yet sometimes it seems to me as if it were yesterday, or even tomorrow, and anything but thousands of miles distant. There are moments when it feels like I never left—or maybe I mean, when it feels like it left with me, like Afghanistan and my once-upon-a-time life as a U.S. Army Ranger are all right here, right now, in my unheated garage workshop. Right here, right now, in fact, the sawdust is swirling as I run a two-inch slab of walnut through my lousy Ryobi table saw. The dust and the noise from that saw instantly bring to mind an image of an American helicopter landing in the Afghan countryside, not too far from Jalalabad. It all seems suddenly to flash before my eyes — only the dust in Afghanistan was chalkier and finer than the dust from this walnut slab, which is old, but not Afghanistan old.⁴⁹

Reading and hearing the stories of those who have been to war is debilitating. There is so much that does not appear to be defensible. There are many vectors. Included are those who must clean

⁴⁸ Chris Antal, “Patient to Prophet: Building Adaptive Capacity in Veterans Who Suffer Military Moral Injury,” (D.Min. diss., Hartford Seminary, 2017), 91, accessed January 25, 2019, <https://search.proquest.com/openview/6f73a53de6265737a322a112d2027398/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>.

⁴⁹ Rory Fanning, “The Stories War Tells Me A Veteran And Parent,” *The Huffington Post*, November 12, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/will-the-war-stories-ever-end_us_5bc9ba4fe4b00bc3f85dddab.

up the Humvees that have been blown up and pick out the fingers and body parts of the dead and force a bayoneted rifle into the ground with a helmet and dog tags hanging from it. And who can deny the other sources of despair such as the horrors of military sexual trauma and the unthinkable evils of dehumanization. I relay such considerations to a future discourse and provide instead a brief look at some of what has been written about Moral Injury.

The Literature on Moral Injury

Most of the literature on Moral Injury has reported on the construct as it is experienced by military veterans who have faced the throes of war. One of the first books to describe the horrors of war, in the context of moral injury, as suffered by men and women in the military who are active in or have returned home from war is written by Rita Nakashima Brock and Gabriella Lettini.⁵⁰ Using personal stories told by war veterans this book emphasizes the terrific consequences of moral injury while setting it apart from post-traumatic stress disorder. The main argument is that men and women who are involved in war often commit acts and are ordered to commit acts that go against their moral beliefs resulting in unrelenting trauma. The authors do not engage non-military aspects of moral injury except to a lesser degree. It is unlikely that a book or article on moral injury today would fail to cite Brock and Lettini since this book plays such a dominant role in discussions of the construct. I agree with their conclusions and the book is highly relevant for explaining one vitally important manifestation of moral injury in society. I agree with their conclusions also because of at least one of my own experiences with war and its aftermath.

⁵⁰ Rita Nakashima Brock, and Gabriella Lettini. *Soul Repair: Recovering from Moral Injury after War*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013).

Johnathan Shay, a psychiatrist with the Department of Veteran Affairs who is regarded as the originator of the term moral injury,⁵¹ introduces his readers to combat trauma and its deleterious effects on his Vietnam era patients.⁵² This accolade given to Shay, is shared as it “is thought to have originated in the writings of Vietnam War veteran and peace activist Camillo “Mac” Bica,”⁵³ himself a pioneer in the field worthy of mention. Shay's concern is for how soldiers are trained how they are employed and how they are treated when they return home. Shay points out similarities between the character of Achilles in the Iliad, and soldiers in the Vietnam war which he concludes has produced many veterans with severe Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD. He also argues that there are remedies and that it can be prevented. Shay proposes in treatment, unit rotation, return to a helping community, and grief work which tempers anger, revenge, and allows restoration of humanity to the enemy dead, among other benefits. This book is extremely relevant in defining symptoms of the trauma of war and possible remedies.

In a subsequent book, *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming*, Shay turns to another motif from Homer this time using Odysseus as metaphor in reaffirming his thesis.⁵⁴ In the first place his thesis is that war is hell for everyone. Secondly, he states that experiencing war is a memorialization of the adventures of Odysseus and in the third instance that homecoming often envisages “the hated Vietnam Veteran Stereotype of: violent

⁵¹ Conan, “Moral Injury.”

⁵² Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

⁵³ Syracuse University. “What Is Moral Injury.” The Moral Injury Project – Syracuse University, accessed June 8, 2018, <http://moralinjuryproject.syr.edu/about-moral-injury/>.

⁵⁴ Jonathan Shay, John McCain, and Senator Max Cleland, *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming*, (New York: Scribner, 2003). Kindle edition, 33 of 334.

crime, drug addiction, and irresponsible thrill and pleasure seeking”.⁵⁵ Shay asserts that a measured response to the injury should be done in the community; a community of fellow veterans who have been in the thick and thin.

An alternate term used by Johnathan Shay that displays his depth of understanding of the contours of Moral Injury is ‘Themis’ which is a classical Greek term meaning what's right, proper, and customary.⁵⁶ Themis was the Goddess who was the “...personification of justice, goddess of wisdom and good counsel, and the interpreter of the gods’ will.”⁵⁷ For Shay, any disruption in the achievement of Themis results in injury and while his reference was with the military I think it is safe to generalize to the civilian world.

Contemplation of the construct of Moral Injury conjures up several questions as may be expected. As difficult as is the violence white soldiers and veterans encounter are black troops confronted by additional forces? In answer, **Blacks and Stress in the Military** will be explored in the following section. Among the questions most necessary, in this regard, is whether the stress of moral injury is different or exacerbated for service-people who are black. Yet another issue involves one view of **The Military Response to Stress in Soldiers** which follows subsequently.

Despite the fact in general, that the literature on moral injury outside of the military is somewhat silent, I am wont to inquire if there are any implications that have been voiced. I will expand on these questions and this notion in the succeeding section entitled, **Beyond the Military**. Another, compelling question is the inquiry about heredity: could moral injury be

⁵⁵ Shay, *Odysseus in America*.

⁵⁶ Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995. 20.

⁵⁷ “Themis | Greek Goddess,” Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed January 3, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Themis-Greek-goddess>.

passed down? There are a few pieces of literature that suggest there might be some evidence to tentatively respond in a positive way to the possibility of moral injury being hereditary. That matter is addressed below, under the heading of **Trauma and Inheritance**. A fourth question of interest has to do with whether moral injury should be considered as a theological issue. Later in this chapter this question appears under the heading of **Theological Considerations**. Finally, while there is no doubt many other questions of import exist, the last one considered herein asks if moral injury ought to be applied to the offender or offended or perhaps both under the caption **Assignment of Wounds**.

The Military Response to Stress in Soldiers

In the year 2010 the United States Army, recognizing that stress was ubiquitous, launched a program designed in part to “improve performance in combat and reduce problems like depression, post-combat stress disorder and suicide.”⁵⁸ What the army did among other solutions was to partner with the University of Pennsylvania to teach soldiers resilience through the mechanisms of positive psychology. The Army continues to train soldier leaders in resiliency and Michael D. Matthews, reports positive results at the ten-year anniversary.⁵⁹ Such training is worth a concerted effort, for as Carrie Doehring informs, “Resilience is an outcome of caregiving relationships that help people spiritually integrate moral stress.”⁶⁰ My daughter Jennifer, has been trained by the United States Army and conducts Resilience Training on their behalf. She

⁵⁸ “Army To Train Soldiers In Emotional Resiliency,” NPR.org, accessed January 21, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=112717611>.

⁵⁹ Michael D. Matthews, “Ten Years of Military Positive Psychology,” Psychology Today. January 26, 2019. accessed February 8, 2019, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/head-strong/201901/ten-years-military-positive-psychology>.

⁶⁰ Carrie Doehring, “Resilience as the Relational Ability to Spiritually Integrate Moral Stress,” *Pastoral Psychology* 64, no. 5 (October 2015): 635–49, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s>.

has been able to record successes with enlisted troops and with others for whom she provides curricula that address the wounds of bullying in schools.

Admittedly, the spiritual component is lacking, nevertheless, resiliency may very well be one approach to taking on the ill effects, the stress if you will of moral injuries. Dr. Martin Seligman of the Positive Psychology Center said during the NPR broadcast that “The teaching of resilience comes out of the history of cognitive therapy of depression. So, starting about 30 years ago, people like Aaron Beck and Albert Ellis began to look at the catastrophic thoughts that people said to themselves when they were in very adverse situations, and often those thoughts were unrealistic.”⁶¹ One example given as a possible ‘adverse situation’ is of a soldier calling home from overseas who is unable to reach his wife. Does he worry that she is out with someone clandestinely and has left him or is in hospital or that the children are in peril? Into what other calamitous directions might his concern take him? Thoughts of what such pressures may inflict on him are legion and highly detrimental. These somewhat similar and other stressful issues may also lie within the experiences of civilians of the ex-military or non-military genre.

Beyond the Military

Michael D. Matthews contends that,

Moral trauma is not confined to military personnel. People who become law enforcement officers to help make society and their communities safer, but who find themselves working in a corrupt organization experience moral trauma. Workers in corporations, who believe in the intrinsic value of the product or services the corporation sells, may

⁶¹ Army To Train Soldiers.

experience moral trauma when they come to understand that the corporation puts profits above health and safety concerns of customers or even the employees themselves.⁶²

Moving from military situations to those who work in law enforcement is not a colossal leap. It becomes a bit more difficult to enter the world of corporations. Nevertheless, Larry Kent Graham having discussed moral injury in veterans and mentioned the associated dilemmas, goes on to say,

But the concept is not limited, as we shall discover, to veterans. There are many ways that we all struggle with moral injury, when moral injury is broadly understood as the failure to live in accordance with our deepest moral aspirations and as the diminishment that comes from our own actions as well as the actions of those against us. Moral injury – both rendered and received – is a dominant challenge in our current environments.

Indeed, we may say that the toxic moral climate in which we find ourselves is more than injurious. We may even discover that it will prove fatal.⁶³

Attention to Graham's statement provides a bridge between the military and civilian caretakers such as the police and the general public themselves. In the midst today, of public shootings and other aggressions among and between individuals, the cause bandied about is often mental or other psychological distress. The nature, however, of moral injury is that it well may be the underlying culprit.

C. Fred Alford has put forward the notion that, "To live in the world today is to be constantly exposed to moral injury. Lots of people are morally injured, and it is not always

⁶² Michael D. Matthews, "Moral Injury," *Psychology Today*, accessed February 8, 2019, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/head-strong/201803/moral-injury>.

⁶³ Larry Graham, *Moral Injury: Restoring Wounded Souls* (Abingdon Press, 2017). 11.

obvious.”⁶⁴ With this thought in mind I submit that the construct of Moral Injury may be found in several of the varieties of life.

That moral injury is not exclusive to the military, Volunteers of America has gone so far as to state that,

Anyone who works with marginalized, at-risk populations has probably seen that empty stare that can be moral injury. People in poverty. People struggling with addiction. People whose daily lives and their choices erode their feeling of being a good and decent person, worthy of respect. People who carry unprocessed grief and guilt in ordinary life. Because of things we do, witness, are ordered to do, or fail to do in high stakes situations. We can lose our moral foundations and our sense of being a good person.⁶⁵

Larry Kent Graham writes to ensure pastors and others are alerted to some remedies for the Moral Injury that many suffer whether related to military duty or civilian life.⁶⁶ In so doing he diverges from both Brock and Shay and enters fully into the non-veteran sphere. Graham suggests that we all have a moral compass so to speak and that those compasses are broken in many cases and need to be righted. Sometimes it is necessary to break or make new moral standards to steady our moral compass. Moral Injury disorients our compass to the extent that moral dissonance is prevalent. Graham highlights practical applications that pastors, chaplains and others may use in serving those who suffer the debilitations of conscience. Given the growing attention paid to Moral Injury this call to spiritual caregivers is timely and imperative.

⁶⁴ C Fred Alford, “Depoliticizing Moral Injury.” *Journal of Psycho-Social Studies* Volume 9, Issue 1, May 2016. 1. 10.

⁶⁵ “Moral Injury: Haunted by an Emotional Trauma | Volunteers of America,” Volunteers of America: National, accessed December 12, 2018, <https://www.voa-gny.org/moral-injury>.

⁶⁶ Larry Graham, *Moral Injury: Restoring Wounded Souls* (Abingdon Press, 2017); Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*: (New York: Scribner, 1994)

Another writer who is fluent in the application of Moral Injury not only in the military, but also in the civilian arena, is Shelly Rambo.⁶⁷ Shelly Rambo is an associate professor at Boston University School of Theology. In her first book, *Spirit and Trauma: A theology of Remaining*, Rambo presents a picture of how the healing Spirit acts after trauma is encountered. Although Moral Injury is not mentioned stories are told of trauma in the military from the angst of, an Iraqi veteran, and in civilian life, a Katrina survivor. Because trauma often causes a theological contemplation of life and death theologians need to reexamine their language of God's link to the world and their understanding of redemption. The church and its liturgy are necessary and possible responses to the ills of trauma which is gaining theological attention. Rambo posits that Hans Urs von Balthasar raised the persistent question of what happens between death and resurrection, i.e., he asks, what was Jesus doing on Holy Saturday? In addition, the gospel of John and the Triduum are used by Rambo in support of one of her main points which is that trauma may be used as a link to a theology of redemption. This book is relevant in that it recognizes trauma as a concern both militarily and in a civilian environment and that the Spirit is a healing presence.

As in her other book previously mentioned, trauma is the centerpiece in Rambo's second book.⁶⁸ She calls on John Calvin, the wounds of Saint Macrina as described by Gregory of Nyssa, and the story of doubting Thomas in the Gospel of John to describe wounds as they pertain to a theology of the resurrection. These references are read and explicated through the lens of trauma. Wounds are discussed as often recurring such as the non-physical wounds of war and of racial division in the United States that never seem to heal. In addition, there are the

⁶⁷Rambo, Shelly, and Catherine Keller. *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010.

⁶⁸ Rambo, Shelly. *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma*. London and Philadelphia: Baylor University Press, 2017.

wounds of war and above all the wounds of Christ as depicted in the upper room with Thomas and the rest of the disciples. Shelly Rambo has written this book to include a feminist/womanist flavor which connects moral injury with resources from the early Christian tradition that are relevant for this project because it touches on the wounds of war, wounds of everyday life, and wounds of Jesus and others depicted in the Bible.

Perhaps the best extant book suitable for an introduction to moral injury beyond the military is *The Momentum of Hope: Personal Stories of Hope*.⁶⁹ In this book stories are told from the perspective of people who are caregivers and broken because of abuse or another stricture. The classification of Moral Injury as previously stated is fluid. In fact, for one of the stories the title ends in a question mark demonstrating that the author is not fully engaged.⁷⁰ That being said, it is certainly relevant to pay attention to civilian voices and to hear their stories with compassion. It is cogent also to emphasize that there is no attempt in this project, to equate the gruesome realities of combat with the seemingly less horrific events in non-military occurrences. There is room, in addition for the consideration of law enforcement personnel, hospital and emergency management professionals to be folded in with the ingredients of moral injury. My understanding is in concert with Shay who, querying the manner in which moral injury affects someone, replies,

It deteriorates their character; their ideals, ambitions, and attachments begin to change and shrink. Both flavors of moral injury impair and sometimes destroy the capacity for trust. When social trust is destroyed, it is replaced by the settled expectancy of harm, exploitation, and humiliation from others. With this expectancy, there are few options:

⁶⁹ Volunteers of America, *The Momentum of Hope: Personal Stories of Moral Injury* (Volunteers of America, 2018).

⁷⁰ Meryl Comer. *Are Caregivers Victims of Moral Injury?* In *The Momentum of Hope: Personal Stories of Moral Injury* (Volunteers of America, 2018). 110.

strike first; withdraw and isolate oneself from others (e.g., Achilles); or create deceptions, distractions, false identities, and narratives to spoil the aim of what is expected (e.g., Odysseus).⁷¹

This elucidation allows me to see the application of the concept of Moral Injury to the non-military arena because it could be applied to a multitude of experiences that the general public encounters. The “both flavors” to which Shay refers are the sources of moral injury whether through oneself or the application of an outside force. I am led to contemplate how the actions perpetrated on people who were enslaved may be ensconced within one of the “flavors” to which Shay refers.

Slave and Inheritance Trauma

In an excellent disquisition by Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber entitled *Race, Trauma, and Home in the Novels of Toni Morrison*, she has found within the writings of Nobel Laureate Morrison, robust and compelling theses on slave trauma, its shared memory, and its generational impact from the lens of neuroscience. I contend that Schreiber is on point when she states, “Black Americans, as Morrison shows in adept and nuanced ways, suffer from specific historical, contextual, and inherited trauma.”⁷² Schreiber describes from a psychoanalytic, neurobiological, as well as through cultural and social points of view how slavery infects. She mines in the literary works of Morrison precious insights into the impact slavery has had on the concept of home, the bodies, the minds and subsequent generations of blacks. This literary criticism

⁷¹ Jonathan Shay, “Moral Injury,” *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 31, no. 2 (2014): 182–91, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0036090>, 186.

⁷² Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home in the Novels of Toni Morrison*, (Baton Rouge La.: LSU Press, 2013). Kindle edition.

provides a framework for the consideration and understanding of the injuries sustained from slavery and its companion racism, that it has begotten.

Schreiber situates *Inherited and Generational Trauma* which is the title of chapter two in her book, as it relates to characters in Morrison's body of work. She begins the chapter by quoting Dennis Foster's Review of *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse* by James Berger. The quote is as follows, "[T]he traumas of slavery persist as mute presences for African Americans, [and] the racism that produced those traumas persists well."⁷³ In the following section this idea of generational persistence of moral injury as trauma is discussed.

There can be no question that the issue of *transgenerational epigenetic inheritance* is currently undergoing a great deal of questioning scrutiny by many. There is good reason for the attention paid to the topic and as according to Virginia Hughes, as one example,

Epigenetic studies have shown that changes in an organism's external environment — its life experiences and even its choices, if you want to get hyperbolic — can influence the expression of its otherwise inflexible DNA code. Epigenetics, in other words, is enticing because it offers a resolution to the tedious, perennial debates of nurture versus nature.⁷⁴

In concert with other oppositional phenomena one of the possible contributions of epigenetics to the conversation is evident in the work of Janice Gump who cites trauma encountered by Black Americans stemming from racism as stimulated by racism from the time of enslavement into the mire of racial discrimination.⁷⁵ Gump includes the ideas Joy DeGury espouses concerning the

⁷³ Dennis A. Foster, "Trauma and Memory." *Contemporary Literature* 41, no. 4 (2000): 740-47. doi:10.2307/1209010. 746. Quoted in. Schreiber, Evelyn Jaffe. *Race, Trauma, and Home in the Novels of Toni Morrison*.

⁷⁴ Virginia Hughes, "Mice Inherit Specific Memories, Because Epigenetics?," *Science & Innovation*, December 1, 2013, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/phenomena/2013/12/01/mice-inherit-specific-memories-because-epigenetics/>.

⁷⁵ Janice Gump, "Reality Matters: The Shadow of Trauma on African American Subjectivity.," *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 27, no. 1 (January 2010),

transmission of trauma as a result of what she terms Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PSS).⁷⁶

Overall the issue of whether genes of pain and hurt exist and can be transmitted is moot. What is more compelling at this time is the influence of external factors such as family stories and examples, observations of extant societal ethics, and cultural trauma confronted in being physically unlike the majority.

While the study of the transmission of information from one generation of an organism to the next makes initial emotional sense, the question begs for close investigation. Encouragingly, at least one study using mice, suggests that fear can be inherited through at least two generations.⁷⁷ It is not reasonable, however, to try to generalize those results to humans as appears to be the author's end goal. The hunt is on because research in the area is prevalent and Joanne Ryan et al., conclude that,

Certain individuals are more susceptible to stress and trauma, as well as the physical and mental health consequences following such exposure, including risk for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This differing vulnerability is likely to be influenced by genetic predisposition and specific characteristics of the stress itself (nature, intensity and duration), as well as epigenetic mechanisms.⁷⁸

Investigations have been conducted into the transmission of trauma from holocaust survivors to their children and grandchildren who mimic the throes of trauma though they have no personal

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232427116> Reality matters The shadow of trauma on African American subjectivity.

⁷⁶ Joy Angela Degruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*.

⁷⁷ Ewen Callaway, "Fearful Memories Haunt Mouse Descendants : Nature News & Comment," accessed February 11, 2019, <https://www.nature.com/news/fearful-memories-haunt-mouse-descendants-1.14272#ref-link-1>.

⁷⁸ Joanne Ryan et al., "Biological Underpinnings of Trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: Focusing on Genetics and Epigenetics," *Epigenomics* 8, no. 11 (November 2016): 1553–69, <https://doi.org/10.2217/epi-2016-0083>.

experience of the holocaust.⁷⁹ In another study, it was observed that, “The Shoah survivors' grandchildren are similar to controls in affective temperament, hopelessness and self-perception, but they are more irritable and angry than controls, and their perception about others is deeply negative.”⁸⁰

Despite the positive view generated by some scientists and the appeal of ascribing a portion of my own pain and trauma to my ancestors, at least one observer concludes thusly,

The idea that we carry some biological trace of our ancestors' pain has a strong emotional appeal. It resonates with the feelings that arise when one views images of famine, war or slavery. And it seems to buttress psychodynamic narratives about trauma, and how its legacy can reverberate through families and down the ages. But for now, and for many scientists, the research in epigenetics falls well short of demonstrating that past human cruelties affect our physiology today, in any predictable or consistent way.⁸¹

Furthermore, Ali B. Rodgers, et. al, conclude and state in one of their studies,

In summary, our findings demonstrate that male exposure to stress, either throughout puberty or in adulthood, reprograms paternal germ cells and results in transmission of an offspring HPA stress axis dysregulation phenotype. Whether such diminished stress reactivity would be detrimental or beneficial to offspring likely depends on the environment into which they were born, as well as genetic background factors. However, the finding that mild stress experience can produce such long-term changes in male germ cells provides an important and novel mechanism contributing to neuropsychiatric

⁷⁹ Natan P F Kellermann, “Epigenetic Transmission of Holocaust Trauma: Can Nightmares Be Inherited?” *Isr J Psychiatry Relat Sci*- Vol. 50 - No 1 (2013) 33-39.

⁸⁰ Paolo Iliceto et al., “Hopelessness, Temperament, Anger and Interpersonal Relationships in Holocaust (Shoah) Survivors' Grandchildren,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 50, no. 2 (June 2011): 321–29, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-009-9301-7>.

⁸¹ Benedict Carey, “Can We Really Inherit Trauma?,” *The New York Times*, December 11, 2018, sec. Health, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/10/health/mind-epigenetics-genes.html>.

disease risk.⁸² “The hypothalamic pituitary adrenal (HPA) axis is our central stress response system. The HPA axis is an eloquent and every-dynamic intertwining of the central nervous system and endocrine system.”⁸³

My take on this study by Rodgers is that we border once again on the nature versus nurture debate. In other words, although there may be inherited stress genes from father to child, the extent of the stress level received is tempered by the environment in which the child matures.

It is unnecessary to present epigenetic reasons for transgenerational hurt in this paper as there are societal ones that do not necessarily require experimental examination. I have so far mentioned stories, societal conditions, and confrontations with racist actions as harbingers of trauma. Consider for example the idea that we are all molded, motivated, and maintained by our stories. Consider also ethnically diverse families seated around their separate dinner tables while the adults are telling stories. The story of Americans who arrived on the shores of the continent originally, is a story of conquest, a story of rugged individualism propelled by the creator God to build a ‘city upon a hill’, for themselves and their descendants. It is a story of manifest destiny and conquest.

The story at the table of African Americans is a story of *slavery*, a story of being the property of others without dignity, inhuman, and unworthy of all but degradation. Theirs is a story of humiliation, disgrace and submission to the dictates of those destined to make America the new Jerusalem, and to become the powerful ruler of the world by might and whatever other means they deemed necessary.

⁸²Ali B. Rodgers et al., “Paternal Stress Exposure Alters Sperm MicroRNA Content and Reprograms Offspring HPA Stress Axis Regulation,” accessed February 12, 2019, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3712504/>

⁸³ “HPA Axis & Stress Response: Hypothalamic Pituitary Adrenal Axis | Integrative Therapeutics,” accessed February 12, 2019, <https://www.integrativepro.com/Resources/Integrative-Blog/2016/The-HPA-Axis>.

The story of Native Americans is a story of unmitigated decimation, the loss of land and lives, as well as massive denigration of self. It is a story of relegation to reservations often in desolate places indifferent to cultivation and/or living for that matter. The colonizers branded them “Redskins” a disparaging, insulting name used as a metaphor for a race different and excluded; a less than human group admirable only for slaughter and extinction.

The children, grandchildren and other young family members gathered at the table learn cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skills that affirm who they are with respect to whom they are linked, and subsequently how they regard others accordingly. Moreover, Rambo associates trauma in individuals by observing that they lack being able to express the trauma through language. Still, she continues her argument to suggest that,

Fragments of an unspoken event can take symptomatic form in a family member. This phenomenon tells us that there are ways in which an event can be communicated—transmitted—in the absence of anything spoken.⁸⁴

I have never experienced Jim Crow in its heyday yet every time I am at a urinal next to a Caucasian, I am consciously reminded that I could not have done this years ago. There is a sense of not belonging, of being in a restricted space without credentials. The understanding that we had to demonstrate for this privilege, or rather this right, makes me wary that the man next to me might object and I am cowered. Having said that, I hasten to add the caution that I am speaking for myself and that this memory of an unexperienced time may very well not be universal. Still, the hurt is there and yet it is believed that justice has been done. In my scenario with an unsuspecting actor beside me I wonder if he might ever consider the time when it would have been against the law *de jure* or *de facto* for me to be next to him.

⁸⁴ Shelly Rambo and Catherine Keller, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010). 21.

Blacks and Stress in the Military

What the United States Army has not done is visit the particular needs of soldiers of color assuming that their 'adverse situations' are the same for all their troopers, so they fail to single out unique variances. Pamela Lightsey, a war veteran and ordained Methodist minister finds, however, that black veterans suffer additional moral injury agents not encountered by other groups. The main supplementary source at issue is the curse of racism in my opinion. Lightsey is reported as having said in a speech in August of 2016, "Questions of guilt, shame and grief post-war are more complicated for African-American veterans who may ask, 'How can I be a good person to God, that I did these things and why did I do these things for a country that is so bad to my people?'"⁸⁵ Lightsey goes on to present the position that blacks are motivated to join in battle not for standard patriotic reasons but instead "Blacks saw violence against the other as a way to prove that you are human, to prove that they were not mere brutes, mere animals with little capacity to handle day-to-day realities of life without help of a slave master."⁸⁶ She continues on to speak of the time when blacks were put into battle only when the stakes were dire and when white fighters were in need of relief. "For them, moral injury is "not that I let down my upbringing, the shame and guilt of having let down my friends and family, but more the expectation your behavior reflects on entire race . . . Further exacerbating the effects of moral injury is the fact that racism had afflicted extreme trauma on many of those soldiers at home in peacetime, Lightsey said."⁸⁷ A personal story concerning her young military veteran son and his

⁸⁵ Jason Mast, "Pamela Lightsey Shares Differences in Moral Injury for Black Veterans," *The Chautauquan Daily* (blog), August 18, 2016, <http://chqdaily.com/2016/08/pamela-lightsey-shares-differences-in-moral-injury-for-black-veterans/>.

⁸⁶ Mast Jason, "Pamela Lightsey Shares Differences in Moral Injury for Black Veterans

⁸⁷ Mast Jason, "Pamela Lightsey Shares Differences in Moral Injury for Black Veterans

tribulations with the police that caused him to leave school and all but completely drop out of society rounded out her talk.

Beyond any doubt combat soldiers regardless of military occupational specialty code (MOS) suffer numerous indignities. They may become unable to trust anyone, to rely on their weapons as saving items to be used without hesitation, to be tightly wound in anger, and disdain for the enemy. Upon coming home there is often joy and celebration to enjoy once again pleasures denied during deployment. Not all is copasetic, however, as things in the once known world have changed. Wives and husbands have new interests, children are strangers and relocations seem all but impossible. Moral behavior is also in need of rapid adjustment as the weapons are not there and shooting to kill is no longer sanctioned during what appears to be an attack on life. This is where the moral injury of the veteran engenders his or her sleepless nights, the frustrations of seriously wishing to return to the warrior state, or not fitting in any endeavor.

On the other hand, the black person in America, in contrast, has no home to which he or she might return. For them the war is constant and cannot be escaped. There is no furlough or weekend home or chat on a smartphone to provide even a modicum of respite. There are no medals of honor or commendations for bravery and the addition of numbers to the body count. There is no, “thank you for your service” or your contributions and even your actions are within the confines of the law you are viewed with unquestionable suspicion.

Moral Injury and The Oppressor

I turn back now to the question raised in Chapter one concerning whether moral injury rests more nearly, by definition, upon the one who executes harm rather than on the recipient of damage. In his profound book, Wendell Berry advances that, “If the white man has inflicted the wound of racism upon black men, the cost has been that he would receive the mirror image of

that wound into himself.”⁸⁸ Berry shares his story by telling of growing up in the Southern United States and listening to family stories about his great-grandfather who owned slaves. Further, he describes his affiliation with a black man and woman who worked with his family and with whom he grew close as a youth. He grew up to be puzzled about the way blacks were treated and made the grievous decision to invite the man to his tenth birthday party and sit with him in the backyard to boot. After that began his awareness of the wound he suffered in his lifetime and in the unlived years previous to his birth as he contemplated the derogatory reactions of his family and friends to his invitation.

A similar sentiment is expressed by Jim Wallis who is the founder and president of the non-profit organization known as Sojourners. He had not understood his personal experience with the non-interactions of blacks and whites in his community, school, and church as moral injury but now believes such a consideration to be apt. As an inquisitive adolescent Wallis began to ask all manner of questions about the discrepancies between what was being taught to him, how he was supposed to act, and the realities he observed. When he ventured outside his home and to a black church of the same non-denominational bent as his own church, he encountered much different truths. Reading black writers such as Malcolm X and Martin King he began to shift away from the mores of his white heritage. He has said, “I was shocked at what I read and felt betrayed and angry at the brutal facts of racism. Worse, I felt implicated.”⁸⁹

Both Berry and Wallis became involved with private reflections which led to the ability to remove thick layers of scab which revealed the, until then, invisible wound beneath. This is not so for a large group of powerful, privileged, and predominantly petulant people.

⁸⁸ Wendell Berry, *The Hidden Wound*, Second edition Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2010. 4.

⁸⁹ Jim Wallis, “All the Children of the World,” in *The Momentum of Hope: Personal Stories of Moral Injury*, ed. Volunteers of America, Alexandria, VA: Volunteers of America, 2018, 92-101.

The legacy of racism as it pertains to the oppressor has been on the mind of Dale P. Andrews when in 2015, he wrote *What I've Been researching...: Dale P. Andrews* on the Association of Practical Theology website.

I am currently studying issues of race and racism with pastoral and practical theological colleagues exploring theories of *moral injury*. My interests in this collaboration lies in what I would call white moral injury and how this concept might be useful in redressing both willful and passive violence of racism, even in our practical theology. How may moral injury help to understand and redress the dominant white culture's resistance to moral and theological culpability for cultural, systemic, or institutional racism (oppression)?⁹⁰

Andrews asks if applying moral injury understandings to the resistance of culpability by the white culture may be remedied. In a lecture Andrews began by telling the audience,

I come with a plan to address areas of work or issues in your community that I'm confident you are already there, but I came to offer concepts and ways of engaging that might help you in your continued life together in this community.⁹¹

He then proceeded to define and describe the moral injuries brought about by the criticism against anti-racism. He made very valid points about white outrage, and most revealing that like the soldier trained to shoot reflexively, those who are racist also act reflexively and think nothing of it. There is further similarity for example in the notion that if moral injury may last in the combatant for life, it also wounds systemic or cultural racists for life.

⁹⁰ Dale P. Andrews, "What I've Been Researching," *Association of Practical Theology* (blog), February 28, 2015, accessed March 15, 2019, <https://practicaltheology.org/2015/02/28/ive-researching/>.

⁹¹ OldStoneChurch, *Dr. Dale P. Andrews: Moral Injury of Anti-Racism*, 2016, accessed March 15, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vNfA25c5avI&feature=youtu.be>.

This commission or omission exists also absent the specter of war as I shall maintain. Drescher describes human-caused trauma as being events purposely perpetrated. He lists them as, “Muggings, assaults, rape, child abuse, domestic violence, and terrorist attacks”⁹² In this list Drescher fails to include the specter of human-effected racism. Counselors, psychologists, pastors, not to mention everyday care-providers and others, may proclaim that those stressors often result from paths taken that are contrary to morally supported actions. I assert that it is a grievous oversight, on Drescher’s part not to include racism in his list. I argue that racism should be included because it is one pervasively chronic everyday stressor experienced by people of color, that stems not from natural or accidental events, but upon human volition. This assertion will be fully fleshed out in chapter four of this project and is entered here as a preview.

Here again the power of the concept of moral injury seems to have no application bounds. Conceivably, as time goes by the appellation will become ephemeral and a new term may be devised but for the moment and for the purposes of this project, I reiterate that among other things, “Moral Injury results from the violation of a human being’s core moral convictions.”⁹³ It is also evident and I am compelled to confirm that in addition, “core moral convictions” are more often than not rooted in religious or spiritual beliefs and theological assumptions.

Theological Considerations

There appears to be a certain consensus that, “Moral Injury is associated with spiritual/religious (S/R) suffering and a need to find hope, trust, connection, reconciliation, and wholeness.”⁹⁴

⁹² Kent D. Drescher and David W. Foy, “When They Come Home: Posttraumatic Stress, Moral Injury, and Spiritual Consequences for Veterans,” *Reflective Practice: Formation and Supervision in Ministry* 28, no. 0 (2008). accessed August 6, 2018. <http://journals.sfu.ca/rpfs/index.php/rpfs/article/view/158>.

⁹³ Joseph McDonald, ed., *Exploring Moral Injury in Sacred Texts*, Studies in Religion and Theology (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley, 2017). 13

⁹⁴ Lorraine A. Smith-MacDonald, Jean-Sébastien Morin, and Suzette Brémault-Phillips, “Spiritual Dimensions of Moral Injury: Contributions of Mental Health Chaplains in the Canadian Armed Forces,” *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 9 (2018). 1. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2018.00592>.

Whether a person fits into a Spiritual/Religious framework or not it is possible that all are exposed to the dominant concepts of society regarding good and bad, right and wrong. Those understandings, beliefs and mores form the very core of moral existence. Abridging those life sustaining bulwarks requires neither a salve nor pill or medicine, but an attempt to restore the moral underpinnings. This can be done or ought to be done by those who are steeped in addressing Spiritual/Religious damages and who are concerned with the minding of the soul.

I believe the following quote from Doehring bears repeating as it supports and confirms the importance of theological responses to stress and its minions.

Moral stress “she states,” arises from lived theologies and spiritual orienting systems—patterns of values, beliefs, and ways of coping energized by shame, guilt, fear of causing harm, or self-disgust (some of the so-called negative moral emotions that cut people off from social support). Spiritual care compassionately brings to light these life-limiting lived theologies of shame and fear shaped by intersecting social systems of oppression like sexism, classism, and racism. Spiritual care helps people co-create intentional theologies that draw upon goodness, compassion, and love—moral emotions that connect them to the web of life.⁹⁵

From Doehring I conclude that for Christians, it seems necessary and possible to counteract the debilitating consequences of thinking negatively, with the uplifting assurances of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the surety of forgiveness.

Those who have been persuaded to carry out actions that compromise their moral or soul

⁹⁵ Carrie Doehring, “Resilience as the Relational Ability to Spiritually Integrate Moral Stress,” *Pastoral Psychology* 64, no. 5 (October 2015): 635–49, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s>.

beliefs; who may have done so on their own volition, present as needing what Brock and others call soul repair.⁹⁶ In addition, this trauma, this compromise, they suggest should be attended to by chaplains and clergy who might best be able to assist. By placing Moral Injury into a theological arena, they are able to depict moral injury as “...souls in anguish, not a psychological disorder.”⁹⁷ Moreover, for such soul repair, “Across spiritual traditions it is generally accepted that any form of transgression can be repented and amends can be made, and, if this happens, all people, regardless of the type of moral transgression, deserve and will be provided forgiveness.”⁹⁸ These views are borne out by other researchers. “It has been argued that a ‘moral injury’ (however it is defined) may not be a ‘wound’ exacerbated by psychological fear, but rather an injury to the soul, affected by ‘loss or shame, guilt or regret’”⁹⁹ In fact having interviewed and worked with many veterans, clinicians report that “These veterans rarely mention fear. Instead they talk about loss or shame, guilt or regret. They had tried to be heroes, to protect the weak, save their buddies, take the hill. But then they mistakenly killed civilians, forced themselves to drive past wounded children, sometimes missed their moment of truth.”¹⁰⁰

Continued wrestling with guilt, and shame, regret and loss seems to push the injury into the realm of S/R rather than into the psychological. In fact, the distinction between PTSD and Moral Injury is succinctly summed up by Antal and Winnings who say, “The fundamental distinction between moral injury and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is in the core emotion: moral injury is based in *shame* and *guilt* whereas PTSD is rooted in an overwhelming experience

⁹⁶ Rita Nakashima Brock and Gabriella Lettini, *Soul Repair: Recovering from Moral Injury after War* (Beacon Press, 2013).

⁹⁷ Brock, Rita. *Soul Repair*. 51.

⁹⁸ Jennifer H. Wortmann et al., “Spiritual Features of War-Related Moral Injury: A Primer for Clinicians,” *Spirituality in Clinical Practice* 4, no. 4 (2017): 249–61, <https://doi.org/10.1037/scp0000140>.

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¹⁰⁰ Tony Dokoupil, “Are Vets Suffering from Moral Injury?,” *Newsweek*, December 3, 2012, <https://www.newsweek.com/new-theory-ptsd-and-veterans-moral-injury-63539>.

of *fear*.¹⁰¹ This notion is even more tenable when one considers terms for the distress soldiers encounter such as ‘moral sin’, ‘moral pain’ or ‘spiritual injury’¹⁰² that were precursors to Moral Injury.

Carey and Hodgson go further by stating that, “PTSD is essentially a fear based anxiety disorder caused “after a person is exposed to actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violation”¹⁰³ “whereas moral injury is a “broad bio-psycho-social-spiritual sequelae,” which we believe can exist as an independent syndrome and can indicate a “risk factor for impaired life functioning and development, or worsen several psychiatric disorders”¹⁰⁴

Chaplains are the ones upon whom the burden of reviving the souls of soldiers in crisis is placed. Chaplains have been a part of the Army from the 1800s and have provided listening, worship, comfort and guidance in a non-denominational way to all. This includes Muslims, Jews, Hindus, non-believers’ atheists and others. “Even though not all personnel are religious, many have had a spiritual upbringing or influence, where religion has played a fundamental or at least a serendipitous role in the development of their moral worldview.”¹⁰⁵ Chaplains are trained as are additional personnel to listen which is crucial because those who hurt are in need of telling their stories, of facing their demons, as they seek to forgive themselves and others and achieve moral equilibrium.

¹⁰¹ Chris J. Antal and Kathy Winings, “Moral Injury, Soul Repair, and Creating a Place for Grace,” *Religious Education* 110, no. 4 (August 8, 2015): 382–94, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2015.1063962>.

¹⁰² Timothy J. Hodgson and Lindsay B. Carey, “Moral Injury and Definitional Clarity: Betrayal, Spirituality and the Role of Chaplains. SpringerLink,” 2017. 1213. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10943-017-0407-z>.

¹⁰³ Kitchener B, Jorm A, Kelly C. Mental Health First Aid Manual 4th ed Victoria, BC: Mental Health First Aid Australia; (2017). 43. Quoted in Lindsay B. Carey and Timothy J. Hodgson, “Chaplaincy, Spiritual Care and Moral Injury: Considerations Regarding Screening and Treatment,” accessed January 26, 2019, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6290645/>.

¹⁰⁴ Lindsay B. Carey and Timothy J. Hodgson, “Chaplaincy, Spiritual Care and Moral Injury: Considerations Regarding Screening and Treatment,” accessed January 26, 2019, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6290645/>.

¹⁰⁵ Carey, Lindsay. “Chaplaincy, Spiritual Care and Moral Injury.

The role of chaplains is considered in the literature as they delve into helping others with matters of betrayal and spirituality which are common symptoms of moral injury often overlooked by others.¹⁰⁶ Timothy J. Hodgson and Lindsay B. Carey do a comprehensive review of the multiplicity of definitions used to describe moral injury. In so doing, and with an eye towards investigating betrayal and spirituality as they relate to the function of chaplains, succeed in large measure.

Antal gathered a Veterans Administration focus group of combat veterans. The study was designed so as to see that it “provides veterans the opportunity for frame breaking and reframing and holds the possibility of systemic change in a response grounded not in individual therapy or treatment but rather in shared spiritual and moral community.”¹⁰⁷ Antal further posits that many mental care providers, steeped in their own discipline, treat veterans with moral injury as if they are patients. Failure to discard much of the PTSD construct, a provider within its sphere may diagnose veterans as “patients with a disorder,” and thereby ignore the legitimate moral pain that may exist.

While focusing on the theological aspects of moral injury it is necessary that sin be examined to see whether and to what extent it may be situated in the discussion of moral injury. I have mentioned that the morally injured may benefit from forgiveness and if that thought is defensible that forgiveness could be in response to sin. One definition of sin is as follows. “Theologically, sin is the human condition of separation from God that arises from opposition to God’s purposes. It may be breaking God’s law, failing to do what God wills, or rebellion. It

¹⁰⁶ Hodgson Timothy J. “Moral Injury and Definitional Clarity.

¹⁰⁷ Chris Antal, “Patient to Prophet: Building Adaptive Capacity in Veterans Who Suffer Military Moral Injury - ProQuest,” accessed January 25, 2019, <https://search.proquest.com/openview/6f73a53de6265737a322a112d2027398/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>.

needs forgiveness from God.”¹⁰⁸ This one definition is certainly useful although the term is complicated. Roman Catholics will respect mortal sin, and venial sin for example. The former refers to sin that leads to spiritual death for all eternity and the latter, is a somewhat sin that is not that serious. If Moral Injury is viewed as sinful, I can see where the wrongdoer dabbling in corporate sin might be culpable. But what about the victim? The only one of the seven deadly sins that applies to the one who suffers would be anger. I would suggest, absent research on the matter, that with respect to racism individuals may be subject to instances of sinful aggression only in response. Suffice it to say, that the need for forgiveness of himself or herself by the ex-combatant does not correlate with the victim of racism.

Timothy Mallard suggests a companion to accompany Moral Injury referred to as Spiritual Injury (SI). His definition of SI is,

Spiritual injury is the intra and inter-personal damage to souls brought on by significant trauma, including the rupture to foundational religious values, beliefs, and attitudes, the inability to healthfully participate in an immanent human faith community, and the temporary or permanent loss of a transcendent relationship to God (manifested particularly in questions about forgiveness, doubt, truth, meaning, and hope).¹⁰⁹

Certainly, the acceptance of this notion fits the possibility that encountering a spiritual injury is akin to suffering a moral injury that questions matters of religious sensibility.

In the chapter that follows this theme is explored. I turn in it, to examine the development of Black Liberation and Womanist Theologies that are inextricably bound primarily to the moral injuries that may be attributed to racism and borne by black people in a humiliating past and a

¹⁰⁸ Donald K. McKim, *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms, Second Edition: Revised and Expanded* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2014). 260.

¹⁰⁹ Timothy Mallard, “The (Twin) Wounds of War - Providence,” accessed January 26, 2019, https://providencemag.com/2017/02/twin-wounds-war-spiritual-injury-moral-injury/#_ednref12.

churlish present. It has been stated by James Cone in his book *God and the Oppressed*, that “For the oppressed, justice is the rescue from hurt; and for the oppressors it is the removal of the power to hurt others—even against their will—so that justice can be realized for all.”¹¹⁰ While his statement is prophetic, the fact remains that even after the removal of the power the stain lingers on.

Spirituality is suggested as a balm for the “sin sick soul” of the oppressed, overlooked and undervalued.

¹¹⁰ James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, Rev. ed. Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1997.

Chapter 3

Black Liberation Theology and Womanist Theology

In this chapter, I draw attention to the need for and the development of Black Liberation Theology and Womanist Theology through the lens of Moral Injury. To do so is to acknowledge that at the institution of Black Liberation theologies during the late nineteen sixties, the construct of Moral Injury did not exist in the lexicon. In retrospect, it is clear that it did exist in trauma cases but had not been so recognized or named. At the outset also let me state that Black Liberation Theology and Womanist Theology are not one and the same. There is a natural symbiotic relationship, nonetheless. They both interrogate Christianity in America, campaign against racism, and more so with the latter, address sexism, genderism, and particular divergencies from white feminism. The understanding and acceptance of intersectionality is crucial for coming to grips with the network of prejudices and biases realized by blacks. In this regard Rufus Burrow, Jr. posits concerning womanist theology that,

. . . it is similar to black theology in that it has both a political and a theological component. That is, on the one hand woman-ist theology is concerned about power issues involved in relations between women and men and the dehumanizing ways these get played out at the expense of Afrikan-American women, who suffer all forms of abuse, exploitation, and oppression.¹¹¹

There are of course many different Black Liberation theologies, say in the continent of Africa

¹¹¹ Burrow, Rufus Jr. 1999. "Development of Womanist Theology: Some Chief Characteristics," *The Asbury Theological Journal* 54, no. 1, (Spring): 41-58. 49. Accessed February 20, 2019. <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/asburyjournal/vol54/iss1/5>

and the West Indies, nevertheless for this project I am dealing with Black Liberation Theology and Womanist Theology in the United States of America.

Black Liberation theology and Womanist theology address Moral Injury through the recognition of corporate evils and individual malfeasance and are contextual in addressing particular groups with particular experiences. The resultants of the many variations of ill-treatment is expressed in a kind of suffering that exacerbates the damage that the self and soul endure. Additionally, in the throes of that suffering the matter of theodicy is raised. How can a just and loving God ever allow God's children to be so disregarded and subject to a demeaning existence on earth and not as it is heaven? Granted not all evil is moral injury although human initiated moral injury may be considered evil in its application.

Black Liberation theology and Womanist theology also speak to the degradation felt by those who are oppressed under the yoke of white racism and experience unique situations that prevent them from flourishing as expected. These theologies reclaim the black experience as a point of departure and continue to embrace the Christian religion with the interpretation that it specifically addresses the poor and disenfranchised. Moral Injury focuses on the distresses suffered by those who are forced to participate in or otherwise take actions under conditions of moral turpitude that compromise their will and prevent them from self-actualization.

I contend and speak to the point that James Cone generally known as the pioneer of Black Liberation Theology set in motion a sharp criticism of Christianity and what he perceived as its lack of regard for the poor and disenfranchised. In so doing he showed that the church failed to seek to amend the hurt blacks and the disadvantaged encounter. Cone observed that "In a society where men are oppressed because they are *black*, Christian theology must become *Black Theology*, a theology that is unreservedly identified with the goals of the oppressed community

and seeking to interpret the divine character of their struggle for liberation.”¹¹² It was in the turmoil of the frustration and despair of living under the aegis of racism that triggered the birth of Black Liberation Theology in the scholarship of James Cone. Other theologians have responded with vigor to the effects of being black in America. I shall reference Delores Williams, Emilie Townes, and Martin Luther King, Jr. as being among that group of interlocutors.

In this chapter I shall endeavor to show how Black Liberation theology and Womanist theology describe the wounds of racism and in turn, some of the ways they respond to the healing of those wounds. Essentially, it will be argued that human beings have always sought freedom as a condition of being. It is no less so for those who have been forced to live absent that freedom forged by others who claim superiority, especially upon false claims. This chapter will share some of my views on the wounds of racism by showing how Black Liberation Theology and Womanist theology respond to them. In addition, I contend that their unique responses to those wounds is related to a commitment to, and a belief in, the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the next chapter I will argue racial trauma as moral injury, reflecting on further incidents in the news, and through common experiences to illustrate and highlight the arguments in this chapter.

Liberation from Self-hate

Conventional wisdom holds that black people are prone to hate themselves and to lack self-esteem due to ages of racism and discrimination. To think that I hate myself is itself demeaning and I would do everything in my power to avoid self-hate. Nevertheless, if I am honest, I must confess that there is somewhat within me that states that I am inferior, that I lack intelligence and

¹¹² James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 40th Anniversary edition (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2010).

I have internalized all that and other core attitudes which have been absorbed from the dominant society. Despite having made that assertion, I know that the quest to disprove any acceptance of black self-hate is strong. Joseph A Baldwin et. al. returned to a study he had conducted in the 1970s in which he analyzed the then current Western psychological/sociological body of knowledge “which converged around the thesis of a pathogenic self-conception in African Americans beginning in early childhood.”¹¹³ They vigorously postulate that,

“this pathogenic self-conception among African Americans was ultimately reducible to the vicious Euro-centric construct of "black self-hatred" / the 1979 analysis also explored some of the counter-claims, contradictions, refutations and general controversies characterizing this notorious literature.”¹¹⁴

Undaunted, Orville Lloyd Douglas was brave enough to pen an article entitled *Why I hate being a black man*. Writing from the vantage point of Toronto, Canada he advances,

Every time I sit on a crowded street car, bus, or subway train in Toronto, I know I will have an empty seat next to me. It's like a broken record. Sometimes I don't mind having the extra space, but other times I feel awkward, uncomfortable, and annoyed. I know I have good hygiene, I dress appropriately, and I mind my own business. However, recently, I finally became cognizant of why people might fear being around me or in close proximity to me: I am a black male.¹¹⁵

While I tend not to agree with him it is not difficult for me to relate. Douglas goes on to describe himself as a large black man and that that adds to the fear whites have of him. The desire to live

¹¹³ Baldwin, J. A., Brown, R., & Hopkins, R. (1991). The black self-hatred paradigm revisited: An Africentric analysis. In R. L. Jones (Ed.), *Black psychology* (pp. 141-165). Berkeley, CA, US: Cobb & Henry Publishers.

¹¹⁴ J. A. Baldwin, The black self-hatred paradigm revisited.

¹¹⁵ Orville Lloyd Douglas, “Why I Hate Being a Black Man | Orville Lloyd Douglas,” *The Guardian*, November 9, 2013, sec. Opinion, accessed March 5, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/nov/09/i-hate-being-a-black-man>.

up to white standards is a sort of not wanting to be satisfied with oneself. A black person trying to define herself or himself while feeling hate as a surrounding reality may well transfer that hate to himself or to herself. Black Liberation theologies took a page from the book of Black Power proponents and sought to promote black self-esteem by affirming that Black is Beautiful, extolling a black Jesus and a theology of God-talk on the salvation of the disinherited. If there was no large-scale concern with a lack of esteem within the black public then the Black Liberation theologies would be a solution without a problem.

Malcolm X and others maintained that one of the most egregious of the illness blacks endured was what identified as self-hate. By the very ability to absorb and internalize what others said about them and define their humanity or lack thereof, many blacks developed a palpable hate for themselves. James Baldwin cried out that “It took many years of vomiting up all the filth I had been taught about myself and half-believed, before I was able to walk on the earth as though I had a right to be here.”¹¹⁶ It was Malcolm X who put the matter without equivocation. He is quoted by Cone as declaring, “The worst crime the white man has committed was to teach black people to hate themselves.”¹¹⁷ In a sense all the derogatory things said and done to black folk became anodyne and thereby self-fulfilling.

The self-fulfilling prophecies created through the decimation of the character of a people, the self-hate, angered Cone most fully and propelled him to respond with a new theological solution in his thoughts and prepared statements. “I wasn’t writing” he said, “for rational reasons based on library research; I was writing out of my experience, speaking for the dignity of black people in a white supremacist world. I was on a mission to transform self-loathing Negro

¹¹⁶ James Baldwin, *They Can't Turn Back: in Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Library of America, 1998). 636. Quoted in James H. Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody: The Making of a Black Theologian*, First edition (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2018). 60.

¹¹⁷ Cone, James. *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*. 92.

Christians into black-loving revolutionary disciples of the Black Christ.”¹¹⁸ Too often those of us who are educated in America are called upon to always defend a thesis based upon library resources. If only whites could understand that many of the moral injuries they have inflicted cannot be codified. They are felt, psychosocial events within the affective domain. When we say, “I hurt” the response is, “show me where” and frustration builds because the wound does not bleed or puff up and cannot be seen absent a uniquely focused and sharp lens. I was taught as a young graduate student that I could never “prove” anything and that I should be careful in a scientific study to eschew the use of, “it is proven that.” When solving a problem in geometry I was taught to say, “Quod erat demonstrandum” (QED), translated literally from the Latin as “which was to be demonstrated.” The solution to the problem is shown to be complete and though it may be a proof in geometric parlance it has not been proven.

Subtle this is but also demonstrative of the ridiculous need for blacks always to prove that their harms are real and have been experienced. See, for example the lamentations of Edray Goins, a black mathematician, as expressed in a New York Times Race/Related article.¹¹⁹ Goins has given up his full-professorship at a prestigious University for a similar rank at a liberal arts college. Although the article mentions several of the slights that Goins relates, viz, “The hostilities he perceived were subtle, the signs of disrespect unspoken,”¹²⁰ his true purpose for leaving in what many consider an ill-informed move—research institutions are demanding and everybody undergoes personal incriminations—is “to teach undergraduates who are underrepresented.”¹²¹ I contend that it is not only his reminders concerning subtle actions

¹¹⁸ Cone, James. *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*. 92.

¹¹⁹ Amy Harmon, “For a Black Mathematician, What It's Like to Be the 'Only One'.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 18 Feb. 2019, www.nytimes.com/2019/02/18/us/edray-goins-black-mathematicians.html.

¹²⁰ Harmon Amy, “For a Black Mathematician.”

¹²¹ Edray Goins, “Why I’m Leaving a Research I University for a Liberal Arts College,” *Inclusion/Exclusion* (blog), September 15, 2017, <https://blogs.ams.org/inclusionexclusion/2017/09/15/why-im-leaving-a-research-i-university-for-a-liberal-arts-college/>.

representative of systemic racism that motivates him but also the idea that he would shun expected enhancement for serving the disinherited. A significant number of commenters vilified him in response to his untoward experiences and labelled him a crybaby.¹²² In fact, to an outsider the multiple results of real or imagined racial slights may be invisible and downright unprovable in one sense. Self-hate in a person, for example, demeans and yet may not be readily observed by others.

Unlike many blacks, Cone asserts that he himself was not subject to the tribulations of self-hate. He ascribes his strong sense of self-worth to the nurture of the Macedonia African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church and his parents and family at home. Being brought up in church and with loving parents he learned about the love of God. He knew of the good news of Jesus and his death upon the cross for the benefit of humanity. He knew nothing about Black Nationalism or of the historical men and women who had cried out for freedom. Such was not the concern of his school curriculum. But he did experience the sting of racism as it could not be avoided. On becoming aware of the realities of life in America for people of color, and as he became familiar with the shout for Black Power, he wrote his first book under some duress. James Cone acknowledges, in his posthumously published book entitled *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*,

I wrote *Black Theology and Black Power* as an attack on racism in white churches and an attack on self-loathing in black churches. I was not interested in making an academic point about theology; rather, I was issuing a manifesto *against* whiteness and *for* blackness in an effort to liberate Christians from white supremacy.¹²³

¹²²Harmon Amy,. "For a Black Mathematician."

¹²³ Cone, James. *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*, 61.

Self-hate or self-loathing is not unique to black people. There are Christians and no doubt representatives from other religions who suffer a deep wound in that they are so convinced of their sinfulness, so overcome at being unworthy that they succumb to self-hate. Evangelical colleges are often identified as establishments where self-loathing is self-evident. An evangelical undergraduate student speaks to the issue saying, “In two decades and four schools—ranging from conservative to liberal, private to public, pious to secular—I have never encountered the sheer volume of self-loathing that I experienced as a student (and professor) at an evangelical college.”¹²⁴ In this case as with self-hate in general there are thoughts that abound in the mind of the self-loather. Thoughts such, as “I must have done something wrong. I can’t. I am ugly. My nose is too broad. My clothes never fit right. I am too black.” To be clear self-hate will often lead to feelings of shame which is, “...a self-conscious emotion, shame informs us of an internal state of inadequacy, unworthiness, dishonor, regret, or disconnection. Shame is clear signal that our positive feelings have been interrupted.”¹²⁵ And shame is one observable symptom of moral injury.

Black Liberation Theology

At a first glance Latin American Liberationists may have influenced Cone’s work as they too suffered the bane of oppression made visible in poverty and an absence from political, ecclesial, and civic affairs. Or so it may seem as the two movements appeared in close time-based proximity. About the birth and influence of Liberation Theology, the Latin American appellation, on Black Theology, Christopher Rowland wrote, “The initial dynamism may have

¹²⁴ Stephen Dilley, “The Problem of Self Loathing at Evangelical Colleges,” First Things, accessed March 8, 2019, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2014/10/the-problem-of-self-loathing-at-evangelical-colleges>.

¹²⁵ Mary C. Lamia, “Shame: A Concealed, Contagious, and Dangerous Emotion,” Psychology Today, April 4, 2011, accessed March 7, 2019, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/intense-emotions-and-strong-feelings/201104/shame-concealed-contagious-and-dangerous-emotion>.

been in Latin America, but there have emerged parallel movements in Africa, Asia and also Europe and North America.¹²⁶ Still, it was not until 1973 that the two theologies were known to meet each other in dialogue at a small symposium in Geneva sponsored by the World Council of Churches.¹²⁷ The Latin American poor enlisted elements of Roman Catholic social teaching in addressing their realities and feelings of non-personness.

Gustavo Gutiérrez, a Peruvian Priest who is said to have coined the term Liberation Theology, held that, “. . . the question in Latin America will not be how to speak to God in a world come of age, but rather how to proclaim God as Father in a world that is inhumane. What can it mean to tell a non-person that he or she is God’s child?”¹²⁸ Cone might have asked a similar question of North America. In fact, he does speak in his posthumously published memoir of being accused by critics who balked at what they said was his inattention to reconciliation between blacks and whites as he addressed his liberation pronouncements. In response, Cone states,

It was not that I wasn’t interested in such reconciliation, but I felt that first we must speak of black liberation, without which reconciliation has no real meaning. How could blacks be reconciled with people who act in ways that deny their humanity?¹²⁹

That is how deeply conscious Cone was of the profound hurt the malleable injuries of racism plastered on its victims. He was heavily influenced by Malcolm X, the Muslim minister, and Martin Luther King, Jr. the Christian pastor, despite that Martin having promoted non-violence differed substantively from the more violent rhetoric of Malcolm. Cone even went so far as to

¹²⁶ Christopher Rowland, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, 2 ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), xv.

¹²⁷ James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, eds., *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, 2nd ed., rev (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1993). 354.

¹²⁸ Gustavo Gutierrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*: (Wipf & Stock Pub. 2004). 57.

¹²⁹ James H. Cone, *Said I Wasn’t Gonna Tell Nobody: The Making of a Black Theologian*, First edition (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2018). 90.

pen a well-received book about King and X.¹³⁰ The difference between the two men in relation to their response to the oppression of blacks Cone describes as a dream on King's part and on X's, a nightmare. In either case the men agreed that there must be a continuing concerted effort to attack the racism blacks encountered and to seek liberation through non-violent action on the one hand and by any means necessary on the other. To these two black inspirers Cone added James Baldwin so that his earthly trinity was complete.¹³¹

To be clear, the compelling notion referred to above concerning the impact of Latin American Liberation Theology on the motivation of James Cone is unsupported in his writing. Cone makes it clear that the impetus for his becoming known in many circles as the founder of Black Liberation Theology came from within the woundedness of his black body and soul. The unmitigated gall of white supremacists who had racially injured black people injured through lynching and other despicable acts infuriated him. The fact that none of his education addressed the ills further added to his pain and though it might be perfectly acceptable within the walls of academia and supported by Eurocentric ideas it left the lives of the downtrodden unobserved.¹³² The influence of guidance and teaching from parents and church along with the thoughts of Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and James Baldwin, added to his grist in finding a way to interrogate theology such that it addressed and became a voice in the suppression of oppression. Cone, in addition, forged a difficult path because he troubled the murky waters, for him, of Christian theology that many both black and white found highly offensive. As his chapter headings in *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*¹³³ reflect, Cone learned much from critics,

¹³⁰ James H. Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare Reprint Edition* by Cone, James H. (1992) Paperback, Reprint edition (Orbis Books,).

¹³¹ James Cone, "Looking Back, Going Forward," in *Back Faith and Public Talk: Critical Essays on James H. Cone's Black Theology and Black Power*, ed. Dwight N. Hopkins, (Maryknoll N.Y: Orbis Books, 1999), 246-259.

¹³² Cone, James. *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*.

¹³³ Cone, James. *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*.

students and, of course, from the God who saves him from sin. It was impossible for Cone to ignore the epiphany he was experiencing; so, despite the odds, and with the support of foreshadowing by mentors and others, he put forth his seminal thoughts both in writing and orally. Admittedly, many of us have been in a location not unlike the one in which Cone found himself, nevertheless it was his deep anguish augmented by a Holy Ghost power, the *Dunamis*, as if he was chosen, that led him to the fore. And in the end, it is the foul injuries that are the pus and blood of moral sores on the souls of black bodies that propelled him. He professes,

As I come to the end of my theological journey, I can't stop thinking about black blood: the blood of Denise McNair (age 11), Carole Robertson, Cynthia Wesley, and Addie Mae Collins (14)—four black girls in Birmingham, Alabama; Emmett Till (14), Trayvon Martin, Jordan Davis (17), and Michael Brown (18)—four teenage black boys from the North and the South. These children, whose names should never be forgotten, were lynched by white men and became symbols of the horrific violence of white supremacy in our time. Whether fifty years ago or today, white men seem to think that they have the right to murder black people, knowing that no jury or judge will convict them for killing niggers. Black Lives don't matter to them. Never have.¹³⁴

These sentiments which combine the falling of body and the dripping of blood is borne out still further as yet other incidents continue, of white police officers failing to be charged in the death of a black man.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Cone, James H. *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*. 170.

¹³⁵ Kristine Phillips, "'You Call This Justice': No Charges against Officer Who Killed Black Man He Mistook for a Mall Shooter," Washington Post, accessed February 7, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/02/06/you-call-this-justice-no-charges-against-officer-who-killed-black-man-he-mistook-mall-shooter/>.

Black Blood

Timothy Samuel Shah in his Introduction to the book he edited with Allen Hertzke, titled *Christianity and Freedom*, discusses “blood as it performs the role of a “seed” in the development of Christian growth.”¹³⁶ The teachings and actions of the divine yet man known as Jesus Christ have offered comfort and hope to many disadvantaged people. In addition, the good news or gospel of that same Jesus promises salvation as well as basic human rights and freedom. Furthermore, Shah contends, “Christian encounter with the persecution and unjust violence suffered by fellow Christians as well as non-Christians has frequently elicited an extraordinarily wide range of innovative and fruitful responses in both theory and practice.”¹³⁷ Undoubtedly, racism has provided the shed “blood,” the “unjust violence” that has formed the fruitful response of Womanist theologies and Black Liberation Theologies,

Anxious to turn back the dangers facing black people under the aegis of racism, black theologians have sought to enter the fray. In fact, religion and Christianity in particular, has played a large part in sustaining black people and in animating their motivation to overcome upsetting oppression. They had been stolen from Africa and constrained to America having been Muslims and Catholics especially if they were associated with the Portuguese. Notably many had also been steeped in African Traditional Religions and practices. So, they had encountered in sum, a

variety of cultural, linguistic, and religious environments in West and West Central

Africa. Most practiced ancient religious traditions focused on maintaining harmonious

¹³⁶ Timothy Samuel Shah and Allen D. Hertzke, eds., *Christianity and Freedom: Volume 1, Historical Perspectives* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016. 4.

¹³⁷ Shah, Hertzke, eds., *Christianity and Freedom: Volume 1. 4.*

relationships with nature and supernatural beings, including gods, spirits, and ancestors.¹³⁸

Enslaved people did not so much appropriate Christianity as they brought much of it with them. Albert Raboteau an historian reasons in fact that, “African spirituality *foreshadowed* ancient Christianity.”¹³⁹ There were many elements of African indigenous worship that were subsumed under and concretized Christianity.

The prospects of securing an answer to the problems of black people, during and after enslavement seemed to be brightest when they surrendered fully to the grace and love of God in Jesus Christ; their only hope. But more needed to be completed. The Christian church had not done all it could to support the cry for help and appeared to act in concert with racists and their confederates. Despite its call that all people are children of God and that all children of God are called to adhere to the Greatest Commandment in which Jesus said, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’³⁸ This is the greatest and first commandment.³⁹ And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’

⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.¹⁴⁰ the church was noncompliant. If it is wrong to fail to adhere to essential tenets such as this commandment, what of other canons creeds and codes? What if Christianity itself was a singular promoter of the institution of slavery? It should not be overlooked that white Christians though their egregious actions persisted suffered themselves from moral indiscretions. Albert J. Raboteau acknowledges that “Pangs of guilt over the cruelty inherent in enslaving fellow human beings were assuaged by

¹³⁸ Judith Weisenfeld, “Religion in African American History,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*, March 2, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.013.24>. Accessed December 10, 2018.

¹³⁹ Albert J. Raboteau, “Afterword,” in *An Unbroken Circle Linking Ancient African Christianity to the African American Experience*, ed. Fr. Paisius Altschul (St. Louis, Mo: Brotherhood of St. Moses the Black, 1997), 162. Quoted in J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (Oxford University Press, 2008). 152.

¹⁴⁰ Matt. 22:37-40 (NRSV)

emphasizing the grace of faith made available to Africans, who otherwise would die as pagans.”¹⁴¹ How is it possible I wonder, for seemingly devout Christians to reconcile their beliefs with the facts of racism and be so nonplussed by complaints and not be ill at ease?

Cone reflects on Christian love, based on two definitions. One he believes to be a love without consequences good or bad. That kind of love is a sentimental love unworthy of the love that Christ embodies. The other is the love that Christ portrays. For black people to believe in the love of Jesus they “must be prepared to meet head-on the sentimental ‘Christian’ love of whites, which would make him/her a nonperson.”¹⁴² In addition, Cone asserts that,

It seems that whites forget about the necessary interrelatedness of love justice and power when they encounter Black people. Love becomes emotional and sentimental. This sentimental, condescending love, accounts for their desire to “help” by relieving the physical pains of the suffering blacks so they can satisfy their own religious piety and keep the poor powerless. But the new blacks, redeemed in Christ, must refuse their “help” and demand that blacks be confronted as persons. They must say to whites that authentic love is not “help,” not giving Christmas baskets, but working for political, social, and economic justice, which always means a redistribution of power. It is a kind of power which enables the blacks to fight their own battles and thus keep their dignity.

“Powerlessness breeds a race of beggars.”¹⁴³

Cone’s assertions, can be illustrated by a story. Angela Davis met with the National United Presbyterian Church in 1971 and was awarded the sum of ten thousand dollars for her defense

¹⁴¹ Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South*, Updated ed. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. 96.

¹⁴² James H. Cone, *Black Theology & Black Power*, Reprint edition (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1997). 54.

¹⁴³ Cone, James. *Black Theology & Black Power*. 54-55.

fund.¹⁴⁴ While the Presbyterians originally wanted to do something to “help” the cause of black people and asked what they could do, Davis suggested that the church might seek to help people help themselves as opposed to giving “Christmas baskets” as Cone stated above. The result was that the Presbyterian Church (USA) began a funding plan that provides for programs developed by the poor and disinherited within their communities. The project is known as the Self-Development of People (SDOP) and it “enters into partnerships with community groups of low-income people that want to change their lives and communities.”¹⁴⁵ Through the SDOP hundreds of community enterprises have been funded and it has created incubator incentives for new business built upon the felt needs of those communities.

Growing up, I learned that the ten commandments were crucial for a good life and the pursuit of happiness although not necessarily in those words. Along with the biblical admonitions there were lessons in doing for oneself and obtaining a good education that might be the bedrock of success. I confess that the golden rule, do to others as you would have them do to you was indelibly written in my head so much so that I lived with it in literal mode and disruptive ideation. When slighted, disrespected or otherwise taken advantage of, I never was able to be reconciled. I could not or would not accept and believe that someone would not treat me as they would wish to be treated themselves. This led to the addition of “naive” to descriptions of me as I entered the adult realm. This naivety extended to my not understanding why and how others came to do what was so much against my tradition and beliefs. I truly held to the gift of love for others as taught, and to the expression and receipt of that love as Cone rightly conveys. I may well have developed a confused moral compass that needed to be righted.

¹⁴⁴ Bettina Aptheker, *The Morning Breaks: The Trial of Angela Davis* (Cornell University Press, 2014). 32.

¹⁴⁵ “Self-Development of People (SDOP) | Presbyterian Mission,” Presbyterian Mission Agency, accessed February 25, 2019, <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/sdop/>.

Admittedly, what I relate is not relegated only to racial considerations but nonetheless is representative of responding to deeply held understandings confounded by what oppressors offer as remedy to the very ones they treat as minions.

Richard Allen, even after becoming a freed slave was, according to Chad Seales, a member of St. George's Methodist Church in Philadelphia from 1786 to 1792, forced to leave as a matter of principle. "He would have stayed longer, but white members wouldn't let him. During the middle of a service, they dragged Allen and fellow Methodist preacher Absalom Jones, also a former slave, from the whites-only seating to the back of the church."¹⁴⁶ They may well have espoused Christian love for him while leaving it unsupported in their actions. Allen founded the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) and is one of the most influential men to have been associated with the black church and protests against slavery and colonialism. Perhaps being afraid of losing control white Christians were loath to allow even free religion in black society. But after a time there developed what is known as the "invisible institution" of slave religion. Raboteau quotes former slave Wash Wilson thusly: "When de niggers go round singin' 'Steal Away to Jesus,' dat mean dere gwine be a 'ligious meetin' dat night. De masters ... didn't like dem 'ligious meetin's so us natcherly slips off at night, down in de bottoms or somewhere. Sometimes us sing and pray all night."¹⁴⁷ There seemed to be compelling influencers stemming from what the enslaved learned about Christian worship that caused imitation. Engaging in the Invisible Institution no doubt gave the participants the opportunity to take some of what was forbidden, fold it into their sometimes-different heritage, and form their

¹⁴⁶ Chad Seales, "That Blacks Are Leaving White Churches Should Surprise Nobody. Here Is What to Do About It," *UT News* (blog), May 17, 2018, <https://news.utexas.edu/2018/05/17/what-to-do-about-blacks-leaving-white-churches/>. Accessed December 10, 2018.

Seales is an associate professor of religious studies at The University of Texas at Austin.

¹⁴⁷ Albert J. Raboteau, "The Secret Religion of the Slaves," *Christian History* | Learn the History of Christianity & the Church, accessed December 10, 2018, [/history/issues/issue-33/secret-religion-of-slaves.html](http://history/issues/issue-33/secret-religion-of-slaves.html).

own flavor of worship. I can envision that their meetings served as the nucleus of a community that kept them in a sustaining embrace. There is always somewhat of a feeling of camaraderie when events take place away from watchful condemning eyes not only for children but adults as well.

In seeking to overcome the state of being oppressed black Americans moving to the North and experiencing fresh visions of their newly extended world, began to raise serious questions about their future in a Christian world. Many different approaches to freedom were experimented with and subjected to much scrutiny. By the time of the 1960s after the splintering of ideas and beliefs the Black Power resistance movement emerged. It was a robust affirmation of racial pride, self-sufficiency, and equality for all people of Black and African descent. In other words, it addressed the very symptoms of a moral injury. Ostensibly, it did not spring full-blown into maturity but was the accumulation of the consideration of Gandhi-like non-violence and the acquisition of freedom by “any means necessary” over a considerable period. In addition, several leaders from the church and from the outside wondered aloud about what they saw as black people worshipping a white God. In answer to a question raised by Louis Lomax during an interview Malcolm X asserted,

Sir, how can a Negro say America is *his* nation? He was brought here in chains; he was put in slavery and worked like a mule for three hundred years; he was separated from his land, his culture, his God, his language! The Negro was taught to speak the white man’s tongue, worship the white God, and accept the white man as his superior. This is a white man’s country. And the Negro is nothing but an ex-slave who is now trying to get himself integrated into the slave master’s house.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ “A Summing Up: Louis Lomax Interviews Malcolm X | Teaching American History,” accessed December 14, 2018, <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/a-summing-up-louis-lomax-interviews-malcolm-x/>.

Malcolm voiced suspicions of a white God, a white Jesus, and promoted the idea that there was something inherently wrong with that picture which needed to be adjusted. He was not alone.

Marcus Garvey for one, expressed a similar notion and in a speech in 1924 said,

I unequivocally rejected the racist assumption of much white American Christianity. Namely, that God had created the Black man inferior, and that he'd intended Negroes to be a servant class, hewers of wood and drawers of water. Well, I predicated my view of man on the Doctrine of Imago Dei, "All men, regardless of color, are created in the image of God". Now, from this premise comes the equality of all men and brotherhood of all men. The Biblical injunction of Acts 17:26 reminds us that he created, of one blood, all nations of men to dwell on the face of the earth and is most interested in brotherhood within his own race. Because if Negroes are created in God's image, and Negroes are Black, then God must, in some sense, be Black! If the white man has the idea of a white God, let him worship his God as he desires. We have found a new ideal. Because once our God has no color, and yet it is human to see everything through one's own spectacles, and since the white people have seen their God through their white spectacles, we have only now started to see our God through our own spectacles.¹⁴⁹

It was into an unspeakable time and with the sentiments of Garvey developed later in life that James Cone was born and grew up.

As did many, if not most African Americans at that time, Cone attended church on a regular basis, often twice each week. Cone noticed the truth of the declaration of Martin Luther King that "Eleven a.m. on Sunday mornings was the most segregated hour of the week." "What

¹⁴⁹"Marcus Garvey - Audio Recordings | Buy Black Movement," accessed December 14, 2018, <https://www.buyblackmovement.com/MarcusGarvey/AudioRecordings/index.cfm#LookForMeInAWhirlwind>.

kind of Christianity is it that preaches love and practices segregation?”¹⁵⁰ James and his brother Cecil asked each other that puzzling question. The racism they experienced especially from the white church that used the titles Baptist and Methodist, similar to what blacks did, continued to exclude despite the convictions that God created all persons equal. Having determined that one shortcoming of the black church was in not having an intellectual approach to their religion Cone extended his education to seminary and a Doctorate in Systemic Theology. It was not until then that he realized his stellar education had failed to include the black experience. But not only that, he also became aware of the effect racism had on the development of university and school curricula, overarched by the great lack of discourse on it from the Christian stalwarts he had studied. He was led thereby to say, “I knew that before I could say anything worthwhile about God and the black situation of oppression in the United States, I had to discover a theological identity that was accountable to the life, history, and culture of African American people.”¹⁵¹

The horrors of racism that had persisted through the ages had produced, I offer, an anxiety, a troubling challenge of conscience and actions that begged for resolution. Racism initially took James Cone away from the reality of his blackness. It caused him to value white Eurocentric thought and above his own realities as he sought to emulate white identity. This is reminiscent of the oft-quoted assertion of William Edward Burghardt DuBois called double consciousness. Of double consciousness in response to the question, “How does it feel to be a problem?” he states,

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks

¹⁵⁰ James Cone, “Looking Back, Going Forward,” in *Black Faith and Public Talk: Critical Essays on James H. Cone’s Black Theology and Black Power*, ed. Dwight N. Hopkins, Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1999. 248.

¹⁵¹ James Cone, “Looking Back, Going Forward.” 250.

on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.¹⁵²

There is no lack of interpretations of double consciousness but to engage them would not add materially to the current discussion. Suffice it to say that Cornel West added a third dimension and averred in part, that with respect to post-slavery blacks, “Their cultural predicament was comprised of African appearance and unconscious cultural mores, involuntary displacement to America without American status, and American alienation from the European ethos complicated through domination by incompletely European Americans.”¹⁵³ This Westian take further accents the moral harm that blacks encountered.

The tension that Cone experienced coupled with his religious background led to his ability to recognize his moral injury. Indeed, I can find no record of James Cone ever using the term “moral injury.” Nevertheless, I believe that what he expressed fits snugly within the confines of its borders. In a speech to the Yale Divinity School on April 20 of 2017, Cone recalled the shedding of black blood from the 1963 bombing of a church resulting in the death of four young black girls in Birmingham Alabama. He spoke of the death of Emmitt Till, lynching, Jim Crow, and segregation. Following, Cone used the biblical story of Cain and Abel as metaphor for Whites and blacks respectively.¹⁵⁴ In the biblical story Cain causes lethal injury to the body of his brother Abel by shedding his blood, thus killing him. “Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?”¹⁰ And the

¹⁵²William DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folks* (New York: Kindle, 2005)

¹⁵³Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance!: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2002). 31.

¹⁵⁴ Yale Divinity School, *James H. Cone*, accessed January 18, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kyP7BrmII9U>.

LORD said, “What have you done? Listen; your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground!”¹⁵⁵ In similar fashion, the blood of the black bodies under the ground are calling out to the white establishment from the time of enslavement and even today for justice. After Michael Brown was shot and killed by a policeman in Ferguson Missouri, his body is reported to have lain in the street for an extended period of time, displaying his spilled blood as if for all to see his life trickling to, and down a sewage drain.

For about four hours, in the unrelenting summer sun, his body remained where he fell.

Neighbors were horrified by the gruesome scene: Mr. Brown, 18, face down in the middle of the street, blood streaming from his head. They ushered their children into rooms that faced away from Canfield Drive.¹⁵⁶

The vivid images like blown-up photographs seen by those combat veterans who have sometimes wallowed in the blood of comrades are raised in sharp contrast. Likewise, the blood of the enemy and oftentimes the spectacle of their own blood remains with them forever in unending recollection. Their moral injuries persist, as they may attempt to but cannot forget. The cry of black blood also thunders at the ears of black people and brings the tears of sorrow and grief to their eyes. For Cone it was an injury to his soul and required a repair that could only come from forgiveness and expression in a soulful way. He has written about learning from his critics and his motivation to birth a black theology. He has said for instance,

Any critic who mattered would have to understand what set me on fire. White theology didn’t set me on fire. Research in theology, biblical studies, history of religions, sociology, philosophy, or any other academic discipline interested me but didn’t set me

¹⁵⁵ Genesis 4: 9-10 (New Revised Standard Version).

¹⁵⁶ Julie Bosman and Joseph Goldstein, “Timeline for a Body: 4 Hours in the Middle of a Ferguson Street,” *The New York Times*, December 20, 2017, sec. U.S., accessed March 8, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/24/us/michael-brown-a-bodys-timeline-4-hours-on-a-ferguson-street.html>.

on fire. What was happening to black people in the urban centers of Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, and New York, and on the back roads of Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Georgia did that. It was the same things that set Martin and Malcolm on fire: black suffering. It was black fires burning in urban centers and at the foot of Southern lynching trees that created black theology.¹⁵⁷

Unlike a host of others, Cone found release by applying his pain to a unique solution. That solution was achieved through introspection and the grace of God. This made Cone a prophet among men and women who was able to share the way to an earthy salvation through teaching and example, and the crafting of a contextual theology. The frustration of felt moral injuries can be motivating. Witness the number of post-war veterans who despite devastating injuries both physical and otherwise make valuable contributions to the positive promotion of the society. They tell their stories in the hope that the scourge of war may be better understood and remedied. They run for public office and even recognize when the wound is so severe as obtains with PTSD, they need to withdraw from working in the public square. Jason Kander made that decision as he dropped out of fulfilling his own political ambitions.¹⁵⁸

Of course, it is possible for any number of people in any select grouping to be subject to all manner of life-interrupting trauma. It is truism also, that while both black and white people face similar human issues it is not difficult to note that hardships are almost always compounded for blacks. If the overall national unemployment rate goes down to 3% the black rate will be higher, and although the gap between the two might shrink there will almost always be a

¹⁵⁷ James H. Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody: The Making of a Black Theologian*, First edition (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2018).

¹⁵⁸ Margaret Stafford and Jim Salter, "Citing Mental Health Reasons, Kander Quits KC Race," Springfield News-Leader, accessed November 1, 2018, <https://www.news-leader.com/story/news/politics/elections/2018/10/02/citing-mental-health-kander-quits-kc-race/1503524002/>.

significant interval of difference. That difference may reveal itself as a function of racism. The racism that affects access to housing and the securing of jobs, healthcare, and the availability of food. In short, all of the social, economic, psychological, services that are denied the poor and needy, a group that predominantly includes blacks. These affects, already dehumanizing in themselves, are by no means attenuated for black women.

Black Women Voices

James Cone represents a first leg of Black Liberation Theology that passed the baton unto another runner who now include the rapid strides of black women. Ostensibly, Cone and other men had, being holders of patriarchal inclinations, failed to include the tremendous afflictions suffered by black women in their definition of a new theology. Be that as it may, a female consciousness has developed and has contributed to the understanding of the distinctive wounds, invisible and observed, that women of color have endured for a very long time. Black women theologians were able to articulate their own experiences that led to new understandings in the quest for freedom from the pain of racism. But not only racism. Black women roiled the development of Black Liberation Theology with the consideration of sexism, gender, and class. In this way, black women made abundantly clear that they endure a type of triple oppression accented by those anomalies. In advancing the discussion of the role of Black Theologies, I turn now to some of the contributions of womanists.

It was tempting for me to speak of Womanist theology as one of liberation. To the contrary, many black women eschew the label of liberation. To be clear there are black women who are somewhat averse to the appellation “womanist” and would prefer to be called black feminists. In a roundtable articulation on the subject, Monica A. Coleman asks in her paper title,

*Must I Be Womanist?*¹⁵⁹ By so doing Coleman exposes some irregularities she finds in womanist discourse. Nevertheless, there is no denial that while there are areas such as heterosexism that Coleman finds missing within the conversations of womanists, she applauds their work in racism, sexism, and genderism. In addition, it is important to note that Coleman was writing in 2006 and much has evolved since then.

In fact, womanists see themselves in the words of Katie Cannon, one of the originators of the genre, in the following manner. She states in response to Coleman, again in 2006,

We womanists, for our part, must lay bare the persistent and collective struggle of African Americans to counter more than four hundred years of dehumanizing, racist stereotypes of the “black body as ugly” while simultaneously being an “object of sexual desire.””¹⁶⁰

Clearly, the added burdens womanhood educes from what may be considered vestiges of racism are anathema. The aggressions of paternalism, patriarchy, sexism, genderism, seem to cling like leaches to the flesh of racism compounding the wounds of the black woman. A point common to many if not all womanists, is the concern they share about the dangerous situation in which black women and men find themselves, in terms of self-esteem. A strong positive self-esteem has been the victim of the slings and arrows shot from the bows of racist archers accompanied by the isms of class, gender, sex, age, and hetero-sex. They are all, those isms, cronies because “all involve(d) a negative prejudgment whose purpose is to maintain control and power.”¹⁶¹ Cheryl Townsend Gilkes promotes the womanist assertion of love of self that it holds in emphasis as

¹⁵⁹ Monica A. Coleman et al., “Roundtable Discussion: Must I Be Womanist? [With Response],” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 22, no. 1 (2006): 85–134, accessed March 16, 2019, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20487856>.

¹⁶⁰ Katie G. Cannon et al., “Roundtable Discussion: Must I Be Womanist? 98.

¹⁶¹ Blummenfeld W & Raymond D. (1988) *Looking at Gay and Lesbian Life*. New York: Philosophical Library. 224.

potion for the “Cultural Humiliation” encountered by blacks.¹⁶² That cultural humiliation is the crux of what happens when black people endure racial oppression and it is a major harbinger of the negative self-esteem that obtains.

One essential practice that has become the forte of the womanist theo-ethics is the telling of the stories of black women. What is accomplished thereby is to reveal in large measure the tremendous activities that have been hidden from the public square which refute the presence of cultural humiliation. The stories and the telling of them by womanists today, give voice to the strength, stability and agency of women of color. Those voices seek to engage all in a solidarity of understanding for the interconnectedness of oppressions and the necessity to speak out against them. Karen Baker-Fletcher tells the story of Ann Julia Haywood Cooper born in 1858. Her mother was enslaved and her father the slaveholder and master of her mother. Cooper valued education and through its application slipped the bonds of what Fletcher calls the “new slavery.” Cooper’s education began in 1868 at St Augustine’s Normal and Collegiate Institute, a mission school in Raleigh, North Carolina, founded by the Episcopal Church to educate Black Americans.¹⁶³ From that beginning Cooper went on to earn a Baccalaureate degree and later a Master of Arts in mathematics both from Oberlin College. With degrees in hand she went on to serve as a teacher, a principal and to take a Doctor of Philosophy at the Sorbonne. It is of great value that the stories of black women such as Cooper, Ida B Wells, Harriett Tubman, Shirley Chisholm, and Zora Neale Hurston to name a few, be told in order to turn the tide of

¹⁶² Cheryl T. Gilkes, “The “Loves” and “Troubles” of African-American Women’s Bodies: The Womanist Challenge to Cultural Humiliation and Community Ambivalence,” in *Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, ed. Emilie Townes (NY: ORBIS, 2015) Kindle edition.

¹⁶³ Karen Baker-Fletcher, “” Soprano Obligato:” The Voices of Black Women and American Conflict in the Thought of Anna Julia Cooper,” in *Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, ed. Emilie Townes (NY: ORBIS, 2015) Kindle edition.

dehumanization and cultural humiliation away from the shore. In so doing, womanist ethical considerations expose, identify and offer cogent responses if not cures.

Delores Williams stresses that theologians need to tell those whom they serve in the province of matters of religion, all about their life story and how they come to espouse their theology. Williams describes her developing years in the church and her admiration for the use of faith by her family which allowed her to observe “the miracle of ordinary black women resisting and rising above forces in society, where forces work to destroy and subvert the creative power and energy my (her) mother and grandmother taught me God gave black women.”¹⁶⁴ The forces in society that affected her in the main were the forces of the treatment received at the hands of whites and not all that far behind the treatment of some black men wreaked upon their women.

Growing up in an African-American community in the urban South in the late forties and fifties, I learned early to recognize the forces bent on conquering black women’s power to resist and rise above obstacles. There were some white people’s intentions of ending the lives of black women’s children and demeaning black women. Most children in my neighborhood knew the lore about the lynching of the black man by white people on the lawn of the white hotel around the corner where white people lived. Many children knew a white man raped a black woman and nearly killed her when she resisted. Black People had no recourse in either case. There were also some black men’s intentions of conquering black women’s power of resisting and rising above trouble.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, Anniversary edition, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2013), x.

¹⁶⁵ Williams, Delores *Sisters in the Wilderness*. x.

By no means would I endeavor to defend the behavior of black men as observed by Williams which occurs yet today with unconscionable certainty. I do submit however, in light of the argument of this paper that black men may well be reacting to injuries received, with anger, guilt, self-hate, shame and other violence producers. There were other realities that made an impression on Williams, not the least of which were patriarchal structures with the courts, school systems, and the church.

Embracing the writings and thoughts of Alice Walker and with respect to Walker's admonishment to remember to love oneself, Williams set out to formulate a theology to augment change in the church. Most despicable was the process of keeping women "invisible" in many ways despite the fact that, in the black church at least, they were virtually indispensable. Additionally, Williams having developed her conception of faith discovered that her ultimate goal was "faith seeking understanding."

““Faith seeking understanding” from an oppressed black female’s perspective means affirming the necessity of political and spiritual “works” – affirming these for the salvation of one’s self and for the salvation of the black family, of the homeless, of the destitute, of the young black people lost in the drug culture in North America.¹⁶⁶

The need for the concept of love for oneself and others and the requirement of addressing humiliation within all people is clearly within the purview of Williams but especially as it affects black women. Moreover, the original impetus for her work is in response to the moral injuries sustained by black women and men resulting from racism and its cohorts. Williams is neither alone nor isolated in this basic way of thinking.

¹⁶⁶ Williams, Delores *Sisters in the Wilderness*. xii.

Katie Cannon is in synchronization with Delores Williams telling the story, nonetheless, from its origins in the fault filled deep dark days and nights of slavery in America.¹⁶⁷ Like Williams, Cannon chronicles the shortcomings of the black church which has preserved androcentric habits and thereby exacerbated the oppression of black women. Along with the suffering of black people in general, from the days of enslavement to the current time is the understanding that the Christian scriptures are rooted in deprivation and suffering but with strong inclinations for hope and release. Cannon holds high the power of story-telling in the preservation of the lives of blacks and credits the slave mothers who told stories to their children to that end.

This engagement of womanist partialities I contend, expands upon the Black Liberation theology first advocated by James Cone. Cone, as I have shown became moved to a new hermeneutic in response to the injuries of racism through womanist interjections. They both converge on that score and attempt to hold on to their Christian Heritage through re-interpretation, story-telling and hope.

Stories of Black Women

One instance of the calamities many women of color suffer that is absent in the life of men may be demonstrated by the following vignette. It has been suggested that while a man may undergo a vasectomy which is minimally invasive Black and Puerto Rican women have been victimized and exploited with salpingotomies, which are female sterilizations performed in hospitals.¹⁶⁸ I would not hesitate to include the isms Black women bring to the table under the rubric of racism. Once again, the lack of regard for black bodies is reflected in the willingness to

¹⁶⁷ Katie G. Cannon, *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (New York: Continuum, 1995).

¹⁶⁸ Francis Beale, "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black And Female," in *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, ed. James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, vol. 1, 2 vols. Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1993. 284-292. 289.

use those women as vessels of experimentation devoid of humanity like mice. The humiliation suffered and the bruises obtained could not help but contribute to soul impairment. It is certainly a deeply depressing matter to have no control over your own body. As Francis Beale avers, “It is the depth of degradation to be socially manipulated, physically raped, used to undermine your own household, and to be powerless to reverse this syndrome.”¹⁶⁹ Yet women have always suffered said indignities and more.

Richard Wright wrote a powerfully evocative poem that describes a leisurely walk in the woods leading to the finding of a body that has been subject to a lynching. The body seems carelessly disposed of with some of the appurtenances of a life lived with the things of life, lipstick, cigar, cigarettes, hat and shoes scattered about.¹⁷⁰ Expanding on this poem Ta-Nehisi Coates borrowed the title of his book *Between The World and Me*, from the heading of Wright’s poem. Coates fashioned his book as a letter to his son in which he warns him that all the police brutality, the beatings, the killings, the humiliations are due to the permission they have to destroy black bodies.¹⁷¹ Coates recounts the violence black bodies have encountered from the moment they became enslaved, to the police brutality of today. Although he writes of the deaths of black men and his dear friend Prince Jones, Coates could have been writing to a daughter. Many victims are not male and in addition, black women have always suffered because of the onslaught of vicious attacks upon the persons of their bodies.

In a related observation there is reason to conclude that much of what black women have been subjected to has been supported by many who failed to question themselves. For Pauli Murray, “Racism and sexism illustrate corporate evils which are built into the structure of the

¹⁶⁹ Francis Beale, “Double Jeopardy: To Be Black And Female. 286.

¹⁷⁰ Richard Wright, “Between the World and Me,” accessed March 8, 2019, <https://www.mun.ca/educ/faculty/hammett/between.htm>.

¹⁷¹ Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, 1 edition (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015).

United States.”¹⁷² In other words what black women have been subjected to has been so embroidered on the fabric of the nation that it is to be found in every aspect of its outerwear. It is virtually impossible to escape the injuries that obtain. Complementary to the harm of sterilizations are other hurts such as surrogacy or the use of black women as proxies in a variety of circumstances.

Delores Williams does great justice to an understanding of the oppression suffered by black women through surrogacy. Williams begins her discussion on the subject by invoking the story of Hagar as told in the Old Testament. In addressing Hagar Williams states, “Because she was a slave, Hagar had no control over her body or her labor. Her body, like her labor, could be exploited in any way her owners desired. Her reproduction capacities belonged to her slave holders, Abraham and Sarah,”¹⁷³ This assertion according to Williams is not unlike the history of African American women although Hagar’s does not extend into social roles beyond the bearing of children. Those social roles include the nurturing of white children even at the expense of their own, performing field labor, becoming head of household of the aforementioned sexual roles. Williams states succinctly, “In the antebellum South coerced surrogacy roles involving black women were in the areas of nurturance, field labor and sexuality.”¹⁷⁴ For example, my mother Ella Gordon served as a mostly live-in companion to a white wife throughout her pregnancy as well as during the gestation period and thereafter. This service was provided for two or three children in the family. I am not suggesting that this work was in any way coerced or that it had the flavor of slavery or the Jim Crow era. My mother had a choice in the matter in the

¹⁷² Pauli Murray, “Black Theology And Feminist Theology: A Comparative View,” in *Black Theology: A Documentary History*. 304

¹⁷³ Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. Anniversary Edition. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2013. 60.

¹⁷⁴ Delores Williams, “Sisters in the Wilderness.” 62.

1950's. Although she never spoke of the matter it is highly possible that Ella experienced what Williams avows occurs after the problems with various expressions of surrogacy.

One result of the hurt perpetrated on black women is that several demeaning stereotypes developed which have persisted even to present time. This is affirmed by Emilie Townes who points out that, "Aunt Jemima has her origins in the Mammy image of U.S. history and culture. From the end of slavery through the Jim Crow era which extended from about 1874 to 1975,¹⁷⁵ the Mammy image served the economic, political, and social interests of White ideology and history in the United States."¹⁷⁶ Townes introduces the idea that the Mammy appearance spawned the Aunt Jemima image and the Jezebel caricature was not far behind. In fact, Townes in forecasting the contents of her book explains that, "I turn to five stereotypes that continue to have profound influence in our social order-Aunt Jemima, Sapphire, the tragic Mulatta, the Welfare Queen, and Topsy-to explore how a manifestation of evil as a cultural production is embodied."¹⁷⁷ Each of these unfortunate appellations contribute to the injuries that black women suffered then and continue to contend with even now. In addition, each confirms according to Townes, the sense of being owned yet human, of being used in the development of power and influence, the expansion of rules and laws, as well as the production of evil. "Sapphire" she adds, "explores uninterrogated coloredness."¹⁷⁸ Considerations of uninterrogated coloredness are not the subject of this paper although it is a compelling part of what Townes contributes to Womanist Ethics. Suffice it to say, that Townes briefly explained uninterrogated coloredness

¹⁷⁵ "Jim Crow Laws and Racial Segregation," Social Welfare History Project, January 20, 2011. Accessed February 28, 2019. <https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/eras/civil-war-reconstruction/jim-crow-laws-and-racial-segregation/>. Various sources differ on the exact dates, however, from the end of Reconstruction to the beginning of the Civil Rights movement is the general consensus. Not all states enacted laws beginning in the same years.

¹⁷⁶ Emilie Maureen Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, Black Religion, Womanist Thought, Social Justice. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. 31.

¹⁷⁷ Emilie Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*. 7.

¹⁷⁸ Emilie Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*. 8.

during an interview at Boston College. She said that, “It is a way to talk about racism that consciously puts white folks into the equation, in opposition to the simple notion of darker skinned people being the problem. It is our collective human problem, and we have got to talk about it.”¹⁷⁹ Without question it is critical that the onus for racist prerogatives be placed most properly on the assailant rather than solely on the victim. It stands to reason therefore, that the necessary scene needs to include all actors if the story is to be correctly displayed.

Emilie Townes has articulated that she is in search of paradise—a paradise not with horrific events when the world comes to an end but instead a paradise that obtains in the present, in the life that is in the now. This paradise she avers, is in concert with Cone’s writings in his book, *Black Theology and Black Power*.¹⁸⁰ She goes on to assert that, “Along with feminist theology, black theology is one of the more contemporary foundations for womanist theological reflection on the nature of this search for paradise.”¹⁸¹ I would conjecture that that paradise based on Townes’ writing is an escape from the throes of the injuries of racism that subvert the dignity and theo-ethical foundations of humanity.

I am deeply disturbed as mentioned, by what I have learned in investigating the entrance of black women into the world of a Black Liberation Theology. It is unconscionable that black men neglected to include their women as they interrogated the Holy Scriptures and sought to sever the bonds of racism. There ought to be absolutely no excuse yet there are those who respond with a call to ontological blackness in which black men and others mimic or mirror what they have observed as an ideal. In other words, “African Americans represent themselves as the

¹⁷⁹ Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil A Conversation with Emilie Townes BOISI CENTER FOR RELIGION AND AMERICAN PUBLIC LIFE BOSTON COLLEGE, CHESTNUT HILL, MASSACHUSETTS OCTOBER 4, 2007

¹⁸⁰ Emilie Townes. Searching for Paradise in Dwight N. Hopkins, ed., *Black Faith and Public Talk: Critical Essays on James H. Cone’s Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1999). 105-125. 108.

¹⁸¹ Townes, Emilie. Searching for Paradise. 109.

mirror of European genius: ontological blackness signifies the blackness that whiteness created.”¹⁸² It appears that black men even in the black church and in academia and elsewhere have acquired much of the ‘heroic’ nature of men in the white world as a vestige of racism. No doubt black women also suffer from the need to be white in appearance and by other indicators but that does not lessen their vigorous contributions to Black liberation Theology that has made it more nearly inclusive as it must be or become. This replication of oppression is evidence of the moral injury that surfaces in the lives of blacks both women and men. To be sure, it is important because it races into the field of psychology. It causes examination of the concept of the Stockholm Syndrome where the oppressed take on the characteristics of the oppressor. “...the Stockholm syndrome is explained in part as an unconscious identification but is also regarded as a conscious coping strategy which can be understood as a form of adaptive behaviour, providing hope for the victim in an otherwise hopeless situation.”¹⁸³ I tend to fall on the side of the understanding of the Syndrome that results in an injury to the person in the sense that it may lead to conditions of self-hate, shame and the other symptoms of moral injury. To consider that it is a mechanism for hope is moot and yet I recognize that there are times when even shame might be positively applied.

Jacquelyn Grant has stated that, “In examining Black Theology it is necessary to make one of two assumptions: (1) either Black women have no place in the enterprise, or (2) Black men are capable of speaking for us. Both of these assumptions are false and need to be discarded.”¹⁸⁴ I mention this tension between the Black Liberationists and Womanists in order to

¹⁸² Victor Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Essay on African American Religious and Cultural Criticism*, First Edition (New York: Continuum Intl Pub Group, 1995). 13.

¹⁸³ Celia Jameson, “The ‘Short Step’ from Love to Hypnosis: A Reconsideration of the Stockholm Syndrome,” *Journal for Cultural Research* 14, no. 4 (October 1, 2010): 337–55, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14797581003765309>.

¹⁸⁴ Jacquelyn Grant. *Black Theology and the Black Woman*. 323-328. In James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, eds., *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, 2nd ed., rev, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1993). 325.

be true to the narrative. Nevertheless, the essential point that racism causes injuries leading not only to suffering but also to a search for ‘paradise,’ is the point of coalescence.

Frances Beale contributes the argument that racism is the ‘afterbirth’ of capitalism and is so determined to eliminate any resistance that it has presented a hurdle for any black person who wants to jump to an expression of his or her humanity. Both men and women have been denied work and that has resulted in an inability to sustain a family. They turn on each other and,

Unfortunately, neither the Black man nor the black woman understood the true nature of the forces working upon them. Many black women tended to accept the capitalist evaluation of manhood and womanhood and believed, in fact, that Black men were shiftless and lazy, otherwise they would get a job and support their families as they ought to. Personal relationships between Black men and women were thus torn asunder and one result has been the separation of man from wife, mother from child, etc.¹⁸⁵

For me the quote above and the argument presented shows in large measure the extent to which racism metastasizes. It has gone beyond the fields of cotton, tobacco and other staples of the nation to the churches and schools and to every aspect of the economy. It has birthed the unfortunate internalized racism in which its tentacles wrap themselves around the victims often unnoticed. Today a great deal is learned from radio, television, the movies and social media. I submit that we adopt the ideas, expectations and dreams from what is constantly put before us. There is a human need to imitate the winners, those who appear to be the successful ones in the society. In so doing we shed some of our heritage and become inured to our pain believing we must be mistaken. For survival the oppressed tends to take on the characteristics of the oppressor and the racism of the oppressor invades the soul of the oppressed to inhabit a new home. It

¹⁸⁵ Francis Beale. *Double Jeopardy: To Be Black And Female*. 284-292. In James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, eds., *Black Theology: A Documentary History*.

speaks of the story in the *Gospel according to Saint Mark*. Jesus encounters a man possessed who asks that his legion of demons be cast out. As they are exorcised the demons leap into the gathered pigs and carry each of the pigs to a death by drowning.¹⁸⁶ Racism seems to be unleashed on the disinherited destroying them in many ways. Awareness of the insidiousness of racism is crucial in seeking freedom from the injuries it precipitates. Black Liberation and Womanist Theologies assist in providing awareness and hence the possibility for adjudication.

Kelly Delaine Brown Douglas developed into a womanist having been greatly stimulated by Black Theology. What James Cone had to say to her resonated deeply and allowed her to connect her blackness with Christianity in a way she had been besieged to achieve. “It related God and Christ to the Black freedom struggle in a way I have never considered,”¹⁸⁷ she has declared. After a while Douglas began to engage in an investigation of feminist theology and noticed that the issue of patriarchy was also present in her enthusiastically encountered introduction to Black theology. She reasoned correctly that Black theology stemmed from the Black Power and Civil Rights movements and was bound up in only one facet in the universe of oppression, viz. racism. This returns us to the point previously stated that, “It did not address the multiple burdens, that is, racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism, which beset Black men and women.”¹⁸⁸ The extent to which the matter presents itself suggests its importance as an area for attention and concentration.

This chapter has brought to the fore, a view of the essential beginnings of Black Liberation theology and Womanist theology. The intent has been to establish a discourse leading to the assertion that the racial disruptions in the lives of black people constitute a grievous and

¹⁸⁶ Mark 5: 1-20 (NRSV)

¹⁸⁷ Kelly Delaine Brown Douglass. “Womanist Theology: What is Its Relationship to Black Theology?” In *Black Theology: a documentary history* ed. James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, vol. 2, 1980-1992. 291.

¹⁸⁸ Brown Douglass, Kelly Delaine. “Womanist Theology.” 291.

deeply felt injury to their souls. In seeking to break the bonds that hold them immobile, black theologians together, and in concert with others have revisited Christian theology and created a more contemporary, useful and helpful understanding. With this in mind the next chapter will elaborate on the occurrence of the elements of racism as a moral injury and will engage the concepts of Black Liberation theology and Womanist theology in so doing.

Chapter 4

Racial Trauma and Moral Injury as Wounds

This chapter explores how the application of racially induced trauma leads to deep wounds of transgression by highlighting some common symptoms of moral injury as it may be evident in black lives. The focus is on common experiences, anecdotal stories and observations. I begin with the statement that there is agreement by many that the symptoms of moral injury include but are not limited to, as further research is conducted, emotional and behavioral domains. As we concluded in chapter 3, memories of the black blood spilled over the years constitutes a roiling set of depressive thoughts and feelings that scream out, “Is that not enough?” “How many more gallons will be required?” The moral injury realized here is hopelessness and despair, combined with the knowledge that just by being black one’s blood may be on an altar of sacrifice.

Admittedly, the role blood plays in war is powerfully horrendous. Yet it does not so far appear in the literature on moral injury. Reporting on work done with the military, “Shame, guilt, and anger at the self or others’ betrayal of basic human values are central to moral injury.”¹⁸⁹ Whereas “PTSD is generally regarded as a fear-based disorder. Moral injury is guilt and shame based.”¹⁹⁰ Therefore, to speak about moral injury is to recognize that it spans a wide spectrum and the degree to which it is experienced varies from one individual or group to another. I will discuss below, shame, guilt, rage, anger, and chronic injuries while acknowledging that there may be others. Perhaps one of the most damaging aspects of what black people experience emotionally is shame. In chapter three I also discussed the occurrence of self-hate perpetuated by

¹⁸⁹ C Fred Alford, “Depoliticizing Moral Injury,” *Journal of Psycho-Social Studies* 9, no. 1 (May 2016): 19. 8.

¹⁹⁰ Shira Maguen and Brett Litz, “Moral Injury in the Context of War - PTSD: National Center for PTSD,” General Information, accessed March 2, 2019, https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/cooccurring/moral_injury.asp.

the negative ideas of self that are heard, read and otherwise received through a racist society. Now as I turn to the issue of shame, I submit that it is inextricably bound with self-hate and loathing.

Shame

The belief structure of black people is often challenged by racist actions against them. In so doing they may find that they are unable for a variety of reasons, to live up to the standards put before them and though they may not be at fault the emotion of shame may overcome them.

As a self-conscious emotion, shame informs us of an internal state of inadequacy, unworthiness, dishonor, regret, or disconnection. Shame is a clear signal that our positive feelings have been interrupted. Another person or a circumstance can trigger shame in us, but so can a failure to meet our own ideals or standards.¹⁹¹

When the notion of incompetence or ignorance is constantly applied to and internalized by an individual or a people there is a possibly inevitable outcome that it constitutes a self-fulfilling prophecy. If only the Pygmalion effect could be satisfied to produce positive results rather than desultory ones, some major amount of good might be achieved.

It is difficult to maintain an attitude of positivity when all about there are consistent signs and signals that are negatively perceived. I have met many students who relate and I myself have been subject to hearing the suggestion that I should perhaps try working with my hands rather than pursue an academic career. When I needed some help in mathematics instead of providing that help, I had professors who wrote me off. “You’re like a blind man stumbling in the dark,” and “Perhaps there is something else in life you can do.” The shame associated with the

¹⁹¹Mary C. Lamia, “Shame: A Concealed, Contagious, and Dangerous Emotion,” *Psychology Today*, April 4, 2011, Accessed March 1, 2019. <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/intense-emotions-and-strong-feelings/201104/shame-concealed-contagious-and-dangerous-emotion..>

understanding that I was a failure was devastating. I received a grade of incomplete that I requested and upon repeating the course encountered a professor of color with whom I was at ease and earned a grade of 'B'. There are hosts of blacks who would not have had the good fortune that I met. I have also observed white students getting extra credit for various reasons to raise their grade. For me if the calculus exam had four questions and I got two incorrect that was failing, and no amount of extra credit could be found in the other calculations to bail me out. Melinda D. Anderson reports that a Native American student, one of two in her class had been excelling in math but, "When her study partner was absent for a series of days, Benjamin-Ficken began to struggle with the material and barely passed the class with a D-minus. Her senior year in AP Calculus repeated the pattern—lacking support and feeling ignored in the class, she passed with a D."¹⁹²

Beyond the classroom and the shame of not succeeding because someone gives the impression of nonexistent prowess there is the pressure of body shame. There are numerous stories and demonstrations of what black women and to some extent men grieve because of their hair. The elements of shame may be easily conflated with those of guilt which also presents as a resultant of lessons in inferiority.

Yet another aspect or manifestation of shame is centered on being in the uncomfortable quagmire of wishing I could be someplace else or simply disappear. Once I received an invitation from my local NPR station to attend a chat and chew. I was somewhat elated but was inclined to decline because I could not determine why I was selected. It turns out that the chairman of the university board of trustees was also president of the NPR station and I convinced myself that several faculty members were selected. I arrived to discover that the

¹⁹² Melinda D. Anderson, "How Does Race Affect a Student's Math Education?," The Atlantic, April 25, 2017, accessed March 1, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2017/04/racist-math-education/524199/>.

majority of attendees were community folk I did not know and that all were white. Immediately, with a sigh I concluded that I was the token and settled into my role, bolstered by many rehearsals. First came the question, “How did you get here?” Following, there were further inane questions and statements which behind my smile caused me to want to simply absquatulate. The final straw was that on a large television screen many were watching a professor demonstrate a teaching method in a class to be aired on NPR. The professor was a native of Ghana, tall, robust with a bit of an accent. The man with whom I was conversing looked up at the screen then turned to me and asked if I was the one pictured in the classroom scene. With a sigh I wondered why he failed to see tribal scars on the face of my colleague, why he could not identify the obvious, to me, differences in anatomy and so I said, shaking my head, “Yes.”

James Weldon Johnson recounts the story in a novel, of his young biracial protagonist. Having witnessed the lynching of a black man by a crowd of angry white men, Johnson’s character reveals that the black man was tied with chains to a vertical railroad tie and set on fire. The absolute horror of watching and taking in the odor of such a travesty is conveyed. The white men had “turned into savage beasts” and as he attempted to compose himself after a little while his character confesses,

A great wave of humiliation and shame swept over me. Shame that I belonged to a race that could be so dealt with; and shame for my country, that it, the great example of democracy to the world, should be the only civilized, if not the only state on earth, where a human being would be burned alive.¹⁹³

The shame Johnson speaks of is a type of internalized racism that touches all of the symptoms of moral injury present in not a few black people. Imagine that being in such a position is in its own

¹⁹³ James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, Kindle.

way a disavowal of one's birth, of one's creation by a God who makes no distinctions between God's children. Johnson's protagonist decries his lot in life and of wanting to divorce his heritage and move to the other side where he might enjoy safety and good fortune. He admits,

I understood that it was not discouragement or fear, or search for a larger field of action and opportunity, that was driving me out of the Negro race. I knew that it was shame, unbearable shame. Shame at being identified with a people that could with impunity be treated worse than animals.¹⁹⁴

Here Johnson succeeds in conveying the desperate issues of the times around the beginning of the twentieth century much of which has been propagated into the present. The debilitating tension of being pulled back towards his heritage and being jerked into denying who he was; the ex-Colored man, known only by that name, chooses like a mugwump to land somewhere in the middle where it may not be possible to be. In any event what gives him pause in the midst of his shame is the constant pain of his guilt of wanting to be other.

Guilt

In several ways the shame that is felt in terms of not being able to achieve academically in a racist environment or not being similar to the mainstream in appearance, or even of being in an undesirable place may be expressed as guilt.

Guilt and shame sometimes go hand in hand; the same action may give rise to feelings of both shame and guilt, where the former reflects how we feel about *ourselves* and the latter involves an awareness that our actions have injured *someone else*. In other words, shame relates to self, guilt to others.¹⁹⁵ Besides,

¹⁹⁴ Johnson, James Weldon, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*.

¹⁹⁵ Joseph Burgo, "The Difference Between Guilt and Shame," Psychology Today, May 30, 2013, accessed March 2, 2019. <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/shame/201305/the-difference-between-guilt-and-shame>.

When talking about moral injury, it is important to distinguish guilt versus shame.

Guilt is an evaluation of the morality of an action, which creates an opportunity for forgiveness. Shame, on the other hand, is a global evaluation of the self, which leads to self-condemnation, avoidance, and withdrawal.¹⁹⁶

Avoidance may lead to other issues which complicate remediation and cause a withdrawal from society such that the injury is confronted in loneliness, the authors contend.

With these understandings it is easier to associate guilt with white fragility, the need to be defensive and to resort to denial if only in the opinion of others. However, guilt may appear in blacks for thoughts and actions as in, “I did the same myself” or “I misinterpreted the encounter.” The guilt of black success is presented in the discussion of **Survivor’s Guilt** below.

Rage

To begin to talk about rage, I recognize once again that it too is a fuzzy concept exhibiting and therefore addressing the anger attributed to moral injury. I propose then that,

Irritation, frustration, anger, rage: these are all forms of anger. And they are feelings first. But when a person’s rage becomes behavior even before thought has a chance to plug in, it is usually because of one of two reasons: 1) it’s been repressed for a long time, and when someone drops the proverbial straw, it explodes; 2) it works for manipulative purposes.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ Thayanne Delima-Tokarz, “The Psychiatric Ramifications of Moral Injury Among Veterans,” *American Journal of Psychiatry Residents’ Journal* 11, no. 5 (May 1, 2016): 10–12, <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp-rj.2016.110505>. Quoted in A. Nazarov et al., “Role of Morality in the Experience of Guilt and Shame within the Armed Forces,” *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica* 132, no. 1 (July 2015): 4–19, <https://doi.org/10.1111/acps.12406>.

¹⁹⁷ Andrea Mathews, “Is Rage a Choice?,” *Psychology Today*, May 23, 2012, accessed March 2, 2019 <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/traversing-the-inner-terrain/201205/is-rage-choice>.

These implications of anger and the reasons for its expression are all anathema to me and yet they are ever present and the attempt to control is fraught with the reality that if not turned loose it festers and explodes somewhat on its own.

Black rage has so impacted society that there exists defense law such that the “Black-rage insanity defense is a legal strategy which exhibits environmental hardships to explain why a person commits a crime.”¹⁹⁸ It appears that the existence of this law suggests an admittance that there is something to the idea that racism does create situations that lead to legitimate explosions of violence. While black people may embrace that law, it is doubtful that others would see any value in it. Acceptance would also imply that there is in fact racism, that it is pervasive, and that understandably it does provoke violence. Such affirmations would be highly unlikely.

“Moral injury often evokes rage”¹⁹⁹ and much of what drove Cone to write his initial book was rage. In the present it is difficult not to resort to fury and to act out in ways others see as ill-advised. Because of the large impact of the concept of rage in the black experience, a considerably greater amount of space is given to it herein, than to the other named symptoms of moral injury.

In college I met a Caucasian woman born in Scotland whose father was a Welshman and therefore a lover of soccer. The young woman and I met as she participated in a physical education class and I watched her play expertly with the ball. Soon after her dad visited, and we were introduced and spent a great deal of time talking soccer. Four of us on a snowy day kicked a ball around and had great fun. The others in our group were male and female Caucasians so the assumption was made that I was there with a white girl. The dean wrote to her dad, the sorority

¹⁹⁸ “Black-Rage Insanity Defense Law and Legal Definition | USLegal, Inc.,” accessed March 2, 2019, <https://definitions.uslegal.com/b/black-rage-insanity-defense/>.

¹⁹⁹ Alford, C Fred, “Depoliticizing Moral Injury,” 8.

she was to pledge told her not to bother and nasty things were written on walls about us. The dean of women called her in and lectured her on blue birds and red birds. We both became angry and, in our rage, we joined forces to fight against the racism of our Presbyterian (USA) college. As a result, we grew to know each other and indeed became friends. I was expelled for academic reasons but that's the trouble with racism, one never knows the real reasons. We were forced to sneak around, me lying on the back seat of the car so I would not be seen. After we were married, I refused to go to the movies early. My wife liked to go early and look at all the coming attractions, get popcorn and so on. I preferred to get there just in time as the lights were dimmed. After a while I asked myself why we had to argue over a simple thing such as what time to arrive for a movie. It was then that I realized that I was afraid to be seen with my wife. Strolling about the lobby was a bit too much. I was demoralized, scared, frightened. On one visit to the theatre a group of black youngsters, bussed in from a group home were in attendance. I cringed that they sat in the very front and were noisy and disruptive. As I began to condemn them in my mind something occurred to me in as vivid a spectacle as the intensity of the colors on the screen. Could it be that the acting out of the young people was a result of their need to become visible? Could it be that they were establishing their presence and saying, "I am somebody"? Perhaps being disruptive is not a proper way to make that argument but in what other ways may anger be attenuated?

Once my anger flared because I was an airman in the United States Air Force who had to live in a one room space at a Salvation Army Home because there was no place for us, an interracial couple to live in town or on the Airbase. "Send her home to her mother" the Air Force inveighed, then I could live on base. Things got so difficult that one day I drove my British convertible two-seater into a gas station where a man stared at us with a silly grin on his face. I

thought he was ridiculing us and succumbing to the rage of being repeatedly hounded, I jumped out of the car and rushed over to him with the intent to hit him as hard as I could. When I got close to him, I saw he had a hole in his throat with a little tube sticking out and his face fixed in a manner I thought was a grin was instead it was the result of some horribly disabling accident. I found in this episode of life with racism a sobering moment calling for introspection and rational considerations in the face of perceivably irrational events. The ache from having to serve the nation and yet be unable to be supported was also troubling.

When my wife was ill, I took her to the base hospital, and I remained out of sight while she was examined. She left the examination room deathly pale and told me they could not diagnose her problem. The doctor followed her out of his office and saw me. Immediately, he took her back into the examination room and subsequently announced that she had a venereal disease. We had only been married a few months. My wife went to a civilian doctor without me, on the same day for she was really sick, and discovered that the issue was her birth control pills which had only recently been placed on the open market. It took every restraint I could muster and the fact that the military doctor was a commissioned officer, to prevent my public cry of rage that he would have determined I transmitted a venereal disease to my wife because of the color of my skin.

A putative result of moral injury may very well be rage as has been argued above. James Baldwin does not hide his feelings when he states with authority, “To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious, is to be in a rage almost all the time. So that the first problem is how to control that rage so that it won’t destroy you.”²⁰⁰ The constant desire to control one’s

²⁰⁰ Baldwin, James et al., 1961. “The Negro In American Culture.” *CrossCurrents* 11, no. 3 (Summer): 205–24. Accessed February 25, 2019. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24456864>.

outbursts and the real need to be able to let it out constitutes a tension that delivers harm to the psyche.

As I have introduced in chapter three, there are many conditions of life that produce inner conflicts of singular application. From those previous references I maintain that blacks are commonly accused of always being full of rage. Who has not heard the condemnation given to a black woman who speaks up? She is immediately tagged stereotypically as, “An Angry Black Woman.” Black men are not immune as they are often seen as “talking loud” and otherwise being aggressive. No one can deny the existence of numerous discussions and debates on black rage. In 1968 Grier and Cobbs published a groundbreaking book titled *Black Rage*.²⁰¹ Both authors are psychiatrists who much like James Cone and others responded in their discourse to the previous trouble filled decade of racial upheaval in the nation. Using case studies Grier and Cobbs tell of the social conditions of blacks that are the legacy of three centuries worth of scars from the weapon of oppression. The front cover of the book designed to be a clinical handbook in non-technical language states, “Two black psychiatrists tell it as it is—in the first book to reveal the full dimensions of the inner conflicts and the desperation of the black man’s life in America.”²⁰²

It is interesting to note with respect to this paper and in regard to racist mistreatment that Grier and Cobbs say the following,

It bears some resemblance to military psychiatry, where the psychiatrist must keep fit for duty the warrior whose primary function is to oppose the enemy. In America the role of blacks, as for humans everywhere, is to live and flourish and to be fit progenitors of generations to come. To do so, they must oppose racism in an unrelenting way.

²⁰¹ William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs, *BLACK RAGE* (Basic Books, Inc., 1968).

²⁰² Greer, William. *Black Rage*.

Psychiatry for such warriors aims to keep them fit for the duty at hand and healthy enough to enjoy the victories that are certain to come.”²⁰³

The difficulty is that in the scenario of Grier and Cobbs blacks most often serve as their own counselors. It is necessary to do so because their complaints are often denied hence no one provides useful assistance. Practitioners are poorly trained or not trained at all to provide care to African Americans. Once an older white physician got frustrated with me and complained bitterly that he could not look into my sinuses with his flashlight because of the darkness of my skin. On his office walls were diplomas from Ivy League Medical Schools. Besides not being so trained, I was not in his medical books, it may never have occurred to him that his knowledge of someone like me might be tainted by racial superiority. I agree with Susan K Smith, who rightly places racism as one of the elements in the set of white supremacy. Smith acknowledges that,

The denial of racism is maddening yet painful, because this nation will not own its white supremacy. If we accept the definition of a specific mental illness, schizophrenia, as “a long-term mental disorder of a type involving a breakdown in the relation between thought, emotion, and behavior, leading to faulty perception,” white supremacy might accurately be called a mental illness.²⁰⁴

Here Smith emphasizes the injury of having felt distress and been ignored and dismissed.

Whatever must be done when there is an unconscionable soreness in someone’s back accompanied by a large swelling to boot, and those around say, “Go home, there’s nothing wrong with you”. Despite the pain and humiliation, a frustration likely builds to anger and rage.

²⁰³ Greer, William. *Black Rage*. Xiii.

²⁰⁴ Susan K. Smith, “White Supremacy: An Illness Denied,” *Huffington Post* Blog, September 30, 2017. Accessed February 25, 2019. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/white-supremacy-an-illness-denied_us_59cee413e4b0f3c468060ec2.

In addition to the case studies reported on by Grier and Cobbs perhaps some of the most poignant and compelling tales are the revelations of bell hooks in her writing. In her book *killing rage: Ending Racism*, hooks opens herself to reveal wounds within that are often kept bottled up and that eat one's soul from the inside out. hooks tells the story of one day trying to find a taxi with her travelling companion in New York City, checking in at the airport and trying to be seated on the plane. One might expect the usual delays in such moments, the density of traffic or perhaps the fact that the theatres have just opened their doors and hundreds of people exit into every available taxi. Or perhaps passports or tickets are forgotten at home. Her experience includes none of that. The two friends secure a taxicab with a driver reluctant to go to the airport. After a delay, the threat of a negative message to his supervisor is the argument needed to convince him to accept the request of two black women. At the airport the couple are ignored, shunted to other queues, and issued incorrect boarding passes one of which does not indicate the submitted upgrade to first-class. In the end, hooks' friend has to sit in coach while a white man takes the seat in first-class next to hooks. These and other incidents of one part of a day in the life of black women led hooks to write,

It was these sequences of racialized incidents involving black women that intensified my rage against the white man sitting next to me. I felt a "killing rage". I wanted to stab him softly, to shoot him with the gun I wished I had in my purse. And as I watched his pain, I would say to him tenderly "racism hurts." With no outlet, my rage turned to overwhelming grief and I began to weep, covering my face with my hands. All around me everyone acted as though they could not see me, as though I were invisible, with one exception. The white man seated next to me watched suspiciously whenever I reached for my purse. As though I were the black nightmare that haunted his dreams, he seemed to be

waiting for me to strike, to be the fulfillment of his racist imagination. I leaned towards him with my legal pad and made sure he saw the title written in bold print: “Killing Rage.”²⁰⁵

To recount bell hooks’ story in this paper is not to do justice to the depth of her hurt in these circumstances. Nevertheless, some of the residue of racism is apparent. I am reminded of the many times when I have had the need like Marc Anthony to “Cry 'Havoc' and let slip the dogs of war.”²⁰⁶ Early one Saturday morning I went to my local bank just as they opened and found that I did not have my ATM card. I entered the bank to make a withdrawal and was accosted by a woman who rushed out of her office, a second at a teller window and a third by a table of deposit and withdrawal slips. As if they had rehearsed all three shouted, “Can I help you?” in unison and with a single voice of accusation. I felt immediately like a criminal. I was completely taken aback. After all I was just entering a bank as if I had reason and the freedom to do so. I forgot for a moment the color of my skin and failed to assume the obligatory countenance of purposefully displaying subordinate status. I recall anger beginning to bubble up for I was taken by surprise and was actually singing a tune as I walked in. I wanted desperately to respond, “yes, could you show me how to load this .357 magnum?” but I thought quickly that the headline in the next day’s paper about a university professor raising Cain in a bank would be unseemly. And certainly, one of those ladies had her finger on the panic button. I was taken into an office and grilled as to whether I had an account at the bank, and in a very condescending manner asked for identification while she checked for verification on an unresponsive computer. After a while, I got up in fury and left the bank with the fact that I may have had as much money deposited as she made working there in a year. I went home and called the bank president whom I knew, and

²⁰⁵ bell hooks, *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*, Reprint edition New York: Holt Paperbacks, 1996. 11.

²⁰⁶ William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* - Kindle Edition. 3.1

he assured me that those ladies were kind and generous grandmothers and would not have upset or offended me. But I was there and experienced the racist atmosphere and the devaluation of my person. He insisted that I was mistaken and offered me nothing to ease my hurt. He simply did not understand, and I had no one to turn to for support. And so, I cried. Like bell hooks, I cried. In frustration I cried. I have never been to that branch of the bank since the incident and could not do so even though it was more conveniently placed than others.

Experiences such as articulated above often carry with them an inner conflict that challenges the soul. I never fully know whether I should have or could have acted in some other manner. Did I do the right thing I wonder. Was it the way I was dressed, or did I have a mean angry expression? The internalization of the fruits of racism ripen into an inedible mess of trying to fit in but never ever getting there. It is a kind of always leaving yet never arriving. It is those *moral ambiguities* once again.

In the final chapter of his book *Race Matters*, Cornel West examines black rage as it is expressed, in his view, by Malcolm X. Black people see themselves through the lens of white people. Their view leads to a devaluation of self and self-loathing. This rejection of white suppression is necessary Malcolm X asserts, for blacks to discard the effects of racism.²⁰⁷

One of the salves to temper rage is to let it out and not keep it in so that it festers and erupts into the pus of evil. Yet in turning loose the rage black people sink deeper into the morass of further debilitating issues with racism. In countless protests including peaceful ones, they are labelled as thugs and criminals, arrested and assigned punishments that far outstrip the alleged crime. For many it just seems as if “we can’t do anything right.” A black security guard at a nightclub, subdues a customer who has discharged a gun. The security guard has his knee in the

²⁰⁷ Cornel West, *Race Matters*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1993. 96.

back of the perpetrator and his gun aimed at his head. The police arrive and somehow the security guard is shot and killed.²⁰⁸ Injury continues to affect the nine-month old son of the deceased who was about to train as a policeman, his family and the community. While many will apply the conclusion to the incident that it was an accident for those who suffer the slings and arrows of racism it is just another example of the knowledge that if he had been white, he would not have died on that night in that way. The reality of the helter-skelter release of black blood from black bodies yet again brings about the injury of rage and disquiet in the community and beyond. The reality of being totally helpless in seeking redress is anathema to family and community who react with rage.

The soul cries out with rage to be at peace, to be fed with the food of living morally, spiritually and socially in concert with other kindred souls. Having been demoralized and rejected and having suffered the most egregious pain is it any wonder that the soul grieves, and desires to expel the hurt and ends up with self-harming behaviors. Behaviors that are not in any way divorced from the behaviors of combat experienced soldiers who have become unable to cope with the demons in their souls.

Fear

It has been established earlier in this chapter that fear is really a symptom of PTSD rather than Moral Injury. Nevertheless, I am willing to say that fear is a penalty of racial injustice. Fear for the black person is that, “they are coming for me next,” or “that body and blood in the street could be mine.” I think that a sense of fear may be implied in the response President Obama gave

²⁰⁸ “Police Fatally Shoot Black Security Guard Who Detained Shooting Suspect,” NPR.org, accessed November 14, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/2018/11/13/667252788/police-fatally-shoot-black-security-guard-who-detained-suspected-shooter>.

after the verdict was returned that the white man who shot and killed unarmed black teenager Trayvon Martin had been acquitted. The first black president of the United States said,

You know, when Trayvon Martin was first shot, I said that this could have been my son. Another way of saying that is Trayvon Martin could have been me 35 years ago. And when you think about why, in the African American community at least, there's a lot of pain around what happened here, I think it's important to recognize that the African American community is looking at this issue through a set of experiences and a history that doesn't go away.²⁰⁹

The president went on to itemize a few micro-aggressions he has been subjected to and similar to what I have experienced. Included are white people who follow physically or just with their eyes any black person who walks into a store. I have had folks jaywalk to get to the other side of the street as I approached on the sidewalk and women clutch their purse in an elevator as the president said he faced.

The daily experiences of many black people from the 1960s of whom James Baldwin writes, and also today I would submit, are fraught with overwhelming and devastating fear. He describes the unrelenting fear that he and others developed as they grew up in Harlem. A fear of two kinds. A fear of the frustrations coupled with fear of parents and a fear of the white man. Life itself and every aspect of it held humiliations that ripped away a sense of self-worth. Moreover, restricted lives limited future possibilities to accepting, either the way of the streets, or of Christianity. In a grippingly effective way Baldwin portrays the result of the dilemma thusly,

²⁰⁹ Barak Obama, "Remarks by the President on Trayvon Martin," whitehouse.gov, July 19, 2013, accessed March 10, 2019, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/07/19/remarks-president-trayvon-martin>.

They began to care less about the way they looked, the way they dressed, the things they did; presently, one found them in twos and threes and fours, in a hallway, sharing a jug of wine or a bottle of whiskey, talking, cursing, fighting, sometimes weeping: lost, and unable to say what it was that oppressed them, except that they knew it was “the man”—the white man. And there seemed to be no way whatever to remove this cloud that stood between them and the sun, between them and love and life and power, between them and whatever it was that they wanted.²¹⁰

The frustrations of living as victims of a suppressive society very clearly provoke a lack of interest in taking good care of oneself and finding more blame for one’s condition in life placed on external and possibly rightly so, rather than on internal forces. Baldwin was not immune to thoughts on those concerns.

Finding the line between good and evil was a preoccupation of James Baldwin in his teenage years. He observed others undergoing a metamorphosis from childhood innocence to the harsh realities of a world dominated by the rules, requirements and dogma of a white society. He could choose the way of sin or the devil on the streets or the security of the Christian faith. Being born into Christianity led him to experience being saved in dramatic fashion, becoming a preacher, and excelling at helping others come to Jesus. As time went by, he became disillusioned with the church, its hypocrisy and false pretenses. As a matter of fact, he asserted that, “In the realm of power, Christianity has operated with an unmitigated arrogance and cruelty...”²¹¹ I can see the appeal of this idea as it leads Baldwin to say further,

It is not too much to say that whoever wishes to become a truly moral human being (and let us not ask whether or not this is possible; I think we must *believe* that it is possible)

²¹⁰ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, New York: Vintage International, 1993. 19.

²¹¹ Baldwin, James. *The Fire Next Time*. 45.

must first divorce himself from all the prohibitions, crimes, and hypocrisies of the Christian church. If the concept of God has any validity or any use, it can only be to make us larger, freer, and more loving. If God cannot do this, then it is time we got rid of Him.²¹²

This is essentially the same kind of conclusion that James Cone, Albert Cleage,²¹³ and several others arrived at when considering the effects of a Christian religion designed and promulgated by white men upon the body of black people whom they enslaved, lynched and continue to subjugate. They contextualized Christianity so as to help oppressed blacks become released from degradation. If human beings are to obtain freedom and self-development, if they are to begin to enjoy the utmost of their human potential, they need institutions and structures that lead to such nurturing. There can be no question concerning the extraordinary impact that Christianity has had on blacks in the United States. It has been so influential that it provided a balm of Gilead to slaves, bolstered the hope and persistence of generations and propelled the Civil rights movement. But that was not enough it was felt. There was something missing. Many blacks are unable to overcome the often-self-fulfilling prophecy precipitated by their belief that indeed they are inferior, unworthy, and undeserving. Several chose the path Baldwin alluded to, the path that led him to say,

For the wages of sin were visible everywhere, in every wine-stained and urine-splashed hallway, in every clanging ambulance bell, in every scar on the faces of the pimps and their whores, in every helpless, newborn baby being brought into this danger, in every knife and pistol fight on the Avenue, and in every disastrous bulletin: a cousin, mother of six, suddenly gone mad, the children parceled out here and there; an indestructible aunt

²¹² Baldwin, James. *The Fire Next Time*. 47.

²¹³ Albert G. Cleage, *The Black Messiah* (Trenton NJ.: Africa Research and Publications, 1989)

rewarded for years of hard labor by a slow, agonizing death in a terrible small room; someone's bright son blown into eternity by his own hand; another turned robber and carried off to jail. It was a summer of dreadful speculations and discoveries, of which these were not the worst. Crime became real, for example—for the first time—not as *a* possibility but as *the* possibility. One would never defeat one's circumstances by working and saving one's pennies; one would never, by working, acquire that many pennies, and, besides, the social treatment accorded even the most successful Negroes proved that one needed, in order to be free, something more than a bank account.²¹⁴

Delores Williams endured episodes in her life that are familiar to most if not all human beings. She relates that she was a believer in God because her mother and all her female ancestors going back to when they were enslaved were women of God. She was aware of the treatment of whites that she and her kin sustained. All of that was draped in the heavy curtain of a patriarchal society and the travail of death. The deaths of her husband early in his life and of her father were difficult to undergo. As a black woman the things that hurt were complex, and Williams was subject to the pressures of racism accompanied by those of sexism and genderism. In the midst of being humiliated and disrespected on protest marches she had to come to grips with the fact that Eldridge Cleaver's mantra "We shall have our manhood or the earth will be razed in our attempts," translated into "'Black woman' had no meaning except babies, pain, and 'standing behind your man.'" ²¹⁵ Not unlike the experience of James Cone, Williams developed provocative questions about Christianity and its place in a racist world. Hers, however, were

²¹⁴ Baldwin, James. *The Fire Next Time*. 20.

²¹⁵ Delores Williams, "Delores S Williams," in *Transforming the Faiths of Our Fathers: Women Who Changed American Religion*, ed. Ann Braude, (Houndmills, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). 115-133. 116.

colored by attitudes of others to her gender. It was a professor who helped Williams to first becoming a feminist and eventually a womanist.

Chronic Injuries and Christianity

Chronic injuries sooner or later cannot be ignored. Whether visible physical sores or wounds, whether invisible internal aggravations that seem to come and go they all beg for attention and remedy. Like the need to scratch a severe itch black people over the years have railed against and sought ways to avoid the hurts received from racism. Many attempts were made to address the egregious demands of being enslaved and its aftermath. There were insurrections galore. In the Civil Rights era blacks with not a few sympathizers marched in large groups and demanded their rights as men and women and as citizens of a nation committed to the ideal that “All men were created equal.”

A most important part of protest and the resolve to be free, has been and is the spark and fuel provided by Christianity. Slaveholders had been loath for quite some time, to allow their slaves to receive instruction in the scriptures. There existed several arguments in support of withholding Christianity. One such argument was that, “Invested economically in the institution of slavery and committed to the notion of the inferiority of Africans, many slaveholders worried that conversion would require manumission and disrupt racial hierarchy.”²¹⁶ In addition, “Many European Americans could not imagine African Americans having the capacity to understand Christianity and also feared that extending baptism and Christian fellowship would convince the enslaved of their equality to whites.”²¹⁷ When slaves were permitted to engage in Christian

²¹⁶ Weisenfeld, Judith. *Religion in African American History*,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*, March 2, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.013.24>. Accessed November 14, 2018.

²¹⁷ Rae, Noel. *The Great Stain: Witnessing American Slavery*. New York, NY: 1st ed. The Overlook Press, 2018. 287.

worship there always had to be a white man in attendance to oversee the conduct.²¹⁸ The curse on Ham and Canaan placed by Noah in Genesis chapter 9, served as a condemnation of blackness and a commendation of servitude for people so named. In the main, when white preachers took to the pulpit, they preached but one central admonition, “Slaves obey your masters.” According to Harriet Ann Jacobs, an escaped and subsequently freed slave in her autobiography, she was invited to a religious service because she could read. The Rev. Mr. Pike was the preacher and after giving out written pieces of what he wanted to convey to those who were readers, he began. “His text was, “Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ.”²¹⁹ He then proceeded to tell his audience of all their shortcomings and how they sought to subvert their master’s orders and therefore were depravely sinful. In addition, slaves were adjured to understand that their injuries suffered in situ would be rewarded in the hereafter when they died. For many slaves their current situation was like unto death, but the allure of eventual salvation was not to be ignored. Still, Jacobs reports that after the benediction, “We went home, highly amused at brothers Pike’s gospel teaching...”

While clinging tenaciously to the tenets of Christianity as they learned to read and write black people in America also began to appropriate stories and passages for their own. The Israelite exodus for example held significant meaning especially the “Let my people go...” and the subsequent reality of that quest. The cruel sentence heaped upon them in their present existence was mitigated by their reliance of what they learned from their Christian worship. More often than not that worship took place in secret, in swamps and other unobtrusive venues.

²¹⁸ Noel Rae, *The Great Stain: Witnessing American Slavery*. 287.

²¹⁹ Jacobs, Harriet. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Slave Narrative Six Pack 3 Kindle Store. 2018. 213. accessed November 14, 2018, https://www.amazon.com/Slave-Narrative-Six-Pack-Incidents-ebook/dp/B01406BAJO/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1542237663&sr=8-1&keywords=slave+narrative+six+pack+3

A description of a secret prayer meeting was recorded by Peter Randolph, who was a slave in Prince George County, Virginia, until he was freed in 1847: Not being allowed to hold meetings on the plantation, the slaves assemble in the swamp, out of reach of the patrols. They have an understanding among themselves as to the time and place of getting together.²²⁰

In this way feelings of contentment with the growing understanding of the Christian religion sustained the community of the enslaved. By no means were all Christian as many had originally come from Muslim parts of Africa but by the time of the approaching nineteenth century most were American born and converted. At any rate, “Prayer, preaching, song, communal support, and especially “feeling the spirit” refreshed the slaves and consoled them in their times of distress. By imagining their lives in the context of a different future they gained hope in the present.²²¹

The great migration allowed black people to travel and to move about in such a way that they began to experience new horizons. They were introduced to whole new worlds that expanded their thoughts and understandings of who they were and how they were situated in the nation and beyond. Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican political activist established the Universal Negro Improvement Association, (UNIA) an organization promoting black unity and African self-determination. Garvey was a champion of black pride and sought to instill in blacks the notion that Black is Beautiful. ²²² Out of the UNIA the African Orthodox Church (AOC) was founded and launched by Bishop George Alexander McGuire its first leader. The AOC “enunciated the

²²⁰ Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*, Updated ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 217, <http://www.questia.com/read/124267413/slave-religion-the-invisible-institution-in-the>.

²²¹ Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*. 218.

²²² Robert A. Hill, Marcus Garvey, ‘The Negro Moses,’ accessed November 15, 2018, <http://exhibitions.nypl.org/africanaage/essay-garvey.html>.

doctrine of a black God and unveiled the black Madonna in Liberty Hall.²²³ All of the work of Garvey, his elevation of Africa, his Black Cross Nurses and overall economic and social upliftment of blacks was done in order to address the requirement for equality and freedom. As with many black leaders who have vigorously spoken out against oppression and the aspects of life blacks confront, Garvey was labeled a dissident. Upon their death, however, they become heroes at best or well-regarded at least. Martin Luther King was vilified, put in jail and derided even when receiving a Nobel Prize. James Cobb reports King's disapproval rating was 75% according to a Harris poll.²²⁴ Concerning William DuBois Amy Bass writes, "Thus, as a host of civil rights activists assembled in the U.S. capital to produce the most visible stance for civil rights yet taken, (The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom) one of the movement's creators died an outcast, exiled by many as a communist turncoat who had committed treason against democracy."²²⁵ Zaheer Ali writes that "At the time of his death, Time magazine remembered Malcolm X unsympathetically as "a pimp, a cocaine addict and a thief" and "an unashamed demagogue."²²⁶ There are others but these three serve to demonstrate the difficulty of speaking against racial intolerance within an intransigent society of those who hold unrelenting power and determine how others are regarded.

²²³ Robert A. Hill, "Marcus Garvey, 'The Negro Moses,'" accessed November 15, 2018, <http://exhibitions.nypl.org/africanaage/essay-garvey.html>.

²²⁴ James C. Cobb, "Even Though He Is Revered Today, MLK Was Widely Disliked by the American Public When He Was Killed | History | Smithsonian," April 4, 2018, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/why-martin-luther-king-had-75-percent-disapproval-rating-year-he-died-180968664/>.

²²⁵ Amy Bass, *Those About Him Remained Silent: The Battle over W. E. B. Du Bois*: (University of Minnesota Press, 2009). xv.

²²⁶ Zaheer Ali, "Malcolm X's Death Revisited," CNN, Tuesday February 17, 2015. accessed February 16, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2015/02/17/opinion/ali-malcolm-x-assassination-anniversary/index.html>.

In a 1996 poll the question was asked of whites whether “the demonstrations by Negroes on civil rights have helped more or hurt more in the advancement of Negro rights.”²²⁷ Of the responders 85% said it hurt. Steve Chapman shares that the peaceful protests of Colin Kaepernick and other National Football League players demonstrate attitudes demonstrably opposed by whites with a similar percentage. It is the kind of puzzling opposition to something that is rather inoffensive. “It’s silent; it’s not disruptive; and it’s entirely nonviolent. It doesn’t block traffic, occupy police or frighten bystanders.”²²⁸ I contend that these and similar earnest attempts to disqualify, dismiss, and discard what most blacks consider to be legitimate claims from leaders and others contributes to disquietude within and injury to the soul. There are the possibilities also, that protests that fail, protests that are not displayed, and behaviors considered atypical may lead to unrelenting guilt and grief.

Survivor’s Guilt

Returning now to the previous section which considered guilt in general I discuss some aspects of guilt as it is known to be within the rubric of Survivor’s Guilt in particular. According to Diana Raab,

Survivor’s guilt is something that people experience when they’ve survived a life-threatening situation and others might not have. It is commonly seen among Holocaust survivors, war veterans, lung-transplant recipients, airplane-crash survivors, and those

²²⁷ Steve Chapman, “Why Do Whites Oppose the NFL Protests?” chicagotribune.com, September 26, 2017. accessed February 16, 2019, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/opinion/chapman/ct-perspec-whites-nfl-anthem-protests-20170927-story.html>.

²²⁸ Chapman Steve, “Why Do Whites Oppose the NFL Protests?”

who have lived through natural disasters such as earthquakes, fires, tornadoes, and floods.²²⁹

I can see in this definition its immediate application to combat soldiers and veterans as they become survivors of combat events. A warrior whose comrade is injured or killed in his presence may be deeply concerned whether he should have been the one to die. The concern may linger and engender damage to the soul mirroring the symptoms of PTSD and of moral injury. Questions that repeatedly become unanswerable persist chronically. Those questions may be the following for example. “Why didn’t I get hurt?” Why did I live when other people died?” “What could I have done differently to prevent it?”

This notion of personal guilt applies in civilian spaces and to all human beings. In 1959 Buddy Holly and three others died in a small plane crash on the day “The music stopped”. Country singer Waylon Jennings had been scheduled to be on that flight but gave it up to another. Before take-off “When Jennings told Holly that he was going to take the bus, Holly jokingly told him he hoped the bus broke down, to which Jennings replied, “I hope your ol’ plane crashes.”²³⁰ ““God almighty, for years I thought I caused it,” the country legend said decades later in a CMT interview.”²³¹ Jennings has been injured by the incident and his subsequent life and celebrity has been tainted with the unrelenting guilt of having been the survivor. Likewise, I maintain many if not all black people may be prone to injury when they fail, in their estimation to live up to the ideals of the dominant society. By way of illustration,

²²⁹ Diana Raab, “What Everybody Should Know About Survivor’s Guilt,” *Psychology Today*, accessed February 25, 2019, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-empowerment-diary/201801/what-everybody-should-know-about-survivors-guilt>.

²³⁰ Stephen L. Betts, “Flashback: How Waylon Jennings Survived Buddy Holly Crash,” *Rolling Stone* (blog), February 3, 2015. Accessed February 25, 2019. <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-country/flashback-how-waylon-jennings-survived-the-day-the-music-died-122992/>.

²³¹ Betts, Stephen L. “Flashback: How Waylon Jennings Survived Buddy Holly Crash.”

Jeanne Spurlock mentions the similarity of what she calls the negative effects of Afro-American success to the military experience of survivor guilt. In her study she mentions that in relation to blacks who have made significant progress within the majority society,

Their reactions have, in many respects, been similar to those of the soldier who has been sent home while his buddies remain on the firing line. Although he is relieved at getting away from what is happening, he feels a sense of guilt for having left his buddies behind.²³²

The tragic story of the tormented life of Leanita McClain whose brilliant gifts and talents were interrupted at the time of her death by suicide at the early age of 32,²³³ is illustrative. McClain was the first black woman to become a columnist and editorial-board member for the Chicago Tribune. McClain sprang from the ghetto of the public housing projects in the South side of Chicago. She proceeded to appearances on national television and excellent writing. She was the epitome of what her former husband Clarence Page, a columnist, referred to as an “African-American, ghetto-to-Gold-Coast success story.”²³⁴ Echoing the twoness assertions of W.E.B. Dubois McClain expressed herself in torment. ““I have a foot in each world,” she wrote in an anguished essay for Newsweek, which headlined it “The Black Middle Class Burden.””²³⁵ In her book, *Passed On: African American Mourning Stories, A Memorial*, Karla FC Holloway quotes Leanita McClain as having said in the Newsweek article,

²³² Jeanne Spurlock, “Survivor Guilt and the Afro-American of Achievement,” *Journal of the National Medical Association* 77, no. 1 (January 1985): 29–32, Accessed February 25, 2019. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2561813/>.

²³³ Richard Guzman, “Leanita McClain: The Middle-Class Black’s Burden,” *Richard R. Guzman*, August 2, 2012, Accessed February 27, 2019, <http://richardrguzman.com/leanita-mcclain-middle-class-blacks-burden/>.

²³⁴ Clarence Page, “Survivor Guilt: The Angst of the Black Bourgeoisie - Baltimore Sun,” March 11, 1966. Accessed February 27, 2019, <https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/bs-xpm-1996-03-11-1996071022-story.html>.

²³⁵ Page, Clarence. “Survivor Guilt.”

I am burdened daily with showing whites that blacks are people. I am in the old vernacular, a credit to my race...though many of them have abandoned me because they think that I have abandoned them....Some of my 'liberal' white acquaintances pat me on the head , hinting that I am a freak, that my success is less a matter of talent than of luck and of affirmative action....As to the envy of my own people, am I to give up my career, my standard of living to pacify them and set my conscience at ease? ²³⁶

Diane Camper describes McClain's dilemma succinctly when she writes, "But success for Leanita McClain, the first black editorial writer for The Chicago Tribune, was spoiled by constant confrontations with racial discrimination and her own identity."²³⁷ I reiterate that moral injuries do not present the same severity for those affected. Whereas McClain was led to suicide, others in similar situations have not been so compelled. Consequently, I do not hesitate to declare my complete empathy and understanding of McClain's quandary. As a university professor for over thirty years I was constantly questioned by students and faculty about the legitimacy of my degrees, and on the other hand I received wide-eyed amazement that I had not been buoyed by Affirmative Action schemes. I can recall giving the name of my alma mater for my highest degree, which is currently ranked at 70 among National Universities, and receiving a negative response about what someone once said about the school. The burden of answering the questions and the consideration of whether the questioners might be observing something about me that I cannot see is anathema. It often occurs to me, as a result, that my constant pursuit of academic degrees is an effort to convince myself and others that I am capable of demonstrating some intelligence and genuine achievement. By the same token, many of my own people

²³⁶ Karla FC Holloway, *Passed On: African American Mourning Stories, A Memorial* (Duke University Press, 2003). 92.

²³⁷ Diane Camper, "In Short: Nonfiction," *The New York Times*, January 18, 1987, sec. Books, <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/01/18/books/in-short-nonfiction-882687.html>.

pressure me as to whether I seek to desert them and move over to the other side as a signal of my becoming. Racist imperatives that teach us we are inferior yet sets the bar for success as being superior makes for a paranoidly laced challenge to align the two. I regret the years I have spent feeling isolated in a white world. The pressure of being on just about every committee so that those committees can claim diversity while being a 'token' leads to sleepless nights wondering about doing right and about doing right has to do with abandoning heritage and culture.

In advancing this discussion on viewing racism through the lens of moral injury and the role of Black Liberation Theology and Womanist Theology plays I now address the theologies.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Coming to the conclusion of this paper, I am more convinced than I was in the beginning that the construct of Moral Injury has a significant place in understanding the agony and harm that has been plaguing black people for a very long time and that threatens to persist for the foreseeable future and beyond. The travails have to be told and understood through stories delivered both orally and verbally so that effective resolutions may be effected. There is every reason then, to use personal occurrences, anecdotes and items from the news of the day to describe the nature of racism in the United States of America.

I realize that there is so much more I might have said and explored, and that there is much more work to be done. I could not reconnoiter in these pages, through all of the many streets and alleyways that might all lead to the central square where moral injury and racism converge.

Standing on a platform built on the experience of the results of racist actions I have a passion for whether there are intersections between racism, moral injury, and Black Liberation as well as Womanist theologies. I have introduced racism as a kind of cancer metastasizing throughout black communities where its ills are manifested. I have suggested that moral injury is an affront to one's soul that gives rise inexorably to spiritual conditions that preclude flourishing. Furthermore, personal stories have been provided as examples of evidence of the micro-aggressions I and others have encountered while living in the United States. To be certain there are also stories shared that are blatantly racist in nature.

Moral Injury is presented as growing out of the military domain and being redefined so that it may be viewed as a source of hurt to persons within the non-military realm. The symptoms of moral injury include but are not necessarily restricted to the elements of Stress, so that a

discussion of its manifestation in military, non-military and blacks in both of those spheres is proffered.

The issue of whether racism qualifies as a harbinger of moral injury has been explored and it is shown that there are similarities to the military concept. I believe that consideration of the construct of Moral Injury is vital to the conversation about racism and its effect on those it addresses. Similarly, the powerful agencies of Black Liberation and Womanist Theology might well be the ticket for the ride to freedom. After all, Black Liberation theology and Womanist theology were gestated out of the womb of black suffering under acts of discrimination and the denial of the right to fully human status. Moreover, I am accepting of the argument that they play a vital role in speaking to the remediation of the effects of moral injury from a spiritual vantage point. Black Liberation Theology and Womanist Theology both seek to interpret scripture away from Caucasian inclinations and towards a gospel of freedom for the poor and undervalued. Womanists provide a more far-reaching and inclusive posture to the conversation bringing into focus the singular traumas both black men and women endure.

The claim is made that the potency of Black Liberation and Womanist theologies could be greatly enhanced with the inclusion of the essence of Moral Injury Theory, because the theologies act in response to the stress, grief, and guilt that blacks endure in the main.

Stress is presented as a symptom of moral injury that presents in similar fashion among subjects from each of the military and non-military domains. It is displayed throughout and within the entire spectrum of human existence.

My perspective on the trauma of moral injury is that it may very well be heritable. The distress that people suffer could be passed down through several generations both from a clinical scientific platform and from a social stance. The first through genetic means and the latter

through the method of story-telling and observation. Moral injury is further shown to display theological repercussions and to beg for theological rejoinders.

Black Liberation Theology and Womanist theology as contemporary languages developed out of the cauldron of the sometimes-repressed anger of black communities. There obtained the steam of release from self-hate and the aroma of black blood poured into the cup of salvation. Not to be ignored are the voices of black women adding to the stew the ingredients of sexism, genderism, classism, and an extra dollop of racism.

I see racial trauma and moral injury as wounds that are septic, that fester and will not heal, often as a result of the receipt of repetitive trauma to itself. More often than not those wounds are invisible but alive and well in the hearts and minds, in the souls of the victims who endure shame, guilt, rage and fear among other symptoms.

James Cone has stated, “There is no future for America without black people.”²³⁸ Having made this bold statement Cone goes on to quote Reverend Hickman who is a character in Ralph Ellison’s book, *Juneteenth*. Hickman says, “The land is ours because we come out of it, our tears watered it, we fertilized it with our dead.”²³⁹ These quotes for me, support my thesis that viewed through the lens of Moral Injury Black Liberation and Womanist theologies respond to the dread of racism. They are supportive to me because black people are indeed permanent citizens of America who have been partakers in the building of the nation whose blood has been shed, whose bodies have toiled to build this prosperous abode. Through the strength of churches, the perseverance and resilience of the black people and the astute lessons of gifted and talented theologians: We shall overcome.

²³⁸ James H. Cone, *Said I Wasn’t Gonna Tell Nobody: The Making of a Black Theologian*, First edition (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2018). 171.

²³⁹ Ralph Ellison, *Juneteenth* PenguinRandomHouse, 2000, quoted in James H. Cone, *Said I Wasn’t Gonna Tell Nobody: The Making of a Black Theologian*, First edition (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2018). 171.

Spirituality and Moral Injury

One of the gladsome aspects of moral injury is that it is receiving a great deal of scrutiny, study and evaluation. The case is not closed as to whether it is distinct from PTSD or deserves a universe of its own. What seems to be clear however, is that it transcends a multiplicity of disciplines. Dr. William Nash, who is a retired Navy psychiatrist and an expert in stress control and moral injury, appeared in a video presentation from a Volunteers of America training session on Moral Injury. In the presentation he asserts that, “It is not a medical thing, it’s not a health care thing, it’s not a religious thing, it’s not a spiritual thing, it’s not a literary thing an artistic or poetic thing, but it is all of those things.”²⁴⁰ As Nash points out moral injury is a human phenomenon to which all are susceptible. I argue that in the universality of what Nash calls ‘things’ spiritual considerations may be reasonably applied to them all.

The establishment of the Soul Repair Center at Brite, Divinity School in 2012 has located the treatment of moral injury in the bedrock of theology and the spiritual domain. The work of the Center began as the development of a remedy in response to moral injury as manifested by military personnel.²⁴¹ A major impetus of the Center is to conduct research and to provide public education maintained as “Spiritual Care for Moral Injury: Equipping Religious Leaders and Faith Communities.”²⁴² There is ample evidence at Brite, suggesting that recovery from moral injury rests within the purview of chaplains, medical health providers, clergypersons and others who provide care to those who present symptoms of moral injury. This assertion is sustained by the Veterans Administration and enterprises such as Volunteers of America.

²⁴⁰ “Moral Injury: Haunted by an Emotional Trauma | Volunteers of America,” Volunteers of America: National, accessed December 12, 2018, <https://www.voa-gny.org/moral-injury>.

²⁴¹ “Soul Repair,” Brite Divinity School, accessed March 3, 2019, <https://www.brite.edu/programs/soul-repair/>.

²⁴² (Soul Repair)

Moral injury, because it is interpreted as being an injury to the soul requires adjudication from sources that are capable of transcending the body and penetrating into the inner self. It is because moral injury is found within, that a spiritual as relating to the nonmaterial, process is required. Much of the harm that accrues from the application of racism is a violation of soul prerogatives and,

The soul is the integrating center of awareness, meaning, and value of the cumulative pain, joy, pleasure, and sensibilities of the human body and the body politic. It is the site of our deepest pain and our most sacred aspirations and values. Moral injury breaks apart its wholeness and stains its purity. Because the soul is also contextually creative, it is the site where healing and transformation may evolve. It is an enduring reality that is also changing for good and ill.²⁴³

The souls of black folks has served not only as the title of the excellent little book written by DuBois but also as a uniting and uplifting concept within the lives of blacks. Witness the advent of “soul food,” “soul music,” and other “soul” expressions so named in the culture of black people. “Soul” is a unifying concept that derived from the need to establish somebody-ness articulated in psychomotor and affective rather than strictly cognitive display.

“To be “spiritual” from an African-American perspective, is to live wholly from the divine soul center of human existence. This center is the core of the universe and the quintessential impetus driving the quest for human fulfillment.”²⁴⁴ Allowing for the existence of “*creative soul force and resistant soul force*” Carlyle Fielding Stewart maintains that they are the components of “...African-American spiritual beliefs and praxis...”²⁴⁵ A creative soul force uses

²⁴³ Larry Graham, *Moral Injury: Restoring Wounded Souls* (Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 2017). 79.

²⁴⁴ Carlyle Fielding Stewart, *Black Spirituality and Black Consciousness: Soul, Culture and Freedom in the African-American Experience* (Trenton NJ: Africa World Press, 1999). 2.

²⁴⁵ Stewart, Carlyle Fielding, *Black Spirituality and Black Consciousness*. 2.

the things that make up spirituality to develop ways and means towards a black culture. A resistant soul force on the other hand is the ability to overcome constraining events that compromise flourishing. The next section discusses spirituality as it pertains to the black church.

The Black Church and Spirituality

Spirituality has played a highly significant role in the survival of black people in the United States of America. W.E.B. DuBois wrote in *The Souls of Black Folks*, “The Negro church of to-day is the social centre of Negro life in the United States, and the most characteristic expression of African character.”²⁴⁶ In the bosom of that church they have persisted through hundreds of years of slavery, Jim Crow laws, lynching, institutionalized racism, current clashes with the police, and other social, economic and psychological degradation. In all the struggles the Black Church has been the strong institution of cohesive potency and sustenance. From the custom of worshipping in the ‘invisible Church’ absent the convicting presence of their overseers, through the birth of their own denominations the Black Church has been a bulwark. As far back as the days of enslavement, “Religion offered a means of catharsis... Africans retained their faith in God and found refuge in their churches.”²⁴⁷ There is a noticeable habit of black people to lift God up in thanksgiving when awarded prizes or commendations. While some of those acts may well be spurious, the role of the black church in their lives is revealed. Successful entertainers, singers, composers, actors and others attribute their talent to being raised in the church. Their foundation, they proudly assert, is in the church. Beyond a doubt, “In African-American history, “the church” has long been at the center of Black communities. It has

²⁴⁶ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover Publications, 1994), 117.

²⁴⁷ “‘The Black Church,’ a Brief History,” African American Registry, accessed March 4, 2019, <https://aaregistry.org/story/the-black-church-a-brief-history/>.

established itself as the greatest source for African American religious enrichment and secular development.²⁴⁸

James Cone has no hesitation in acknowledging that his deepest motivations, his unequivocal commitment to the divine are all because of the black Church. On growing up in Bearden, Arkansas, he wrote, “The black Church introduced me to the essence of life as expressed in the rhythm and feelings of black people...”²⁴⁹ Through the gospel songs, hymns, sermons and communal nature of his home church provided him with joy, with an understanding of a home away from earth and a survival ethic rooted in the “the grace of God” since, “It is called *survival* because it is a way of remaining physically alive in a situation of oppression without losing one’s dignity.”²⁵⁰

For Mary McLeod Bethune American democracy was something in which she had faith. It was an ideal and a dream. She wrote, “For me, it is based on Christianity, in which we confidently entrust our destiny as a people.”²⁵¹ Many of the men and women who led in resistance to the dread of oppression were affiliated with the church. It provided in large measure the wholesomeness of community, of camaraderie and love which are, I believe, ingredients of survival and salves for moral injuries. In several black churches today, the worship services may be viewed as a community affair. There is often an extended discourse on what is happening with individuals and families; birthdays, deaths, graduation, visits from relatives and the like. In addition, the service may last for three or more hours and some people will come and go, some will return, and others stay the course. It is a time for calling out the names of those who are sick,

²⁴⁸ The Black Church.

²⁴⁹ James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, Rev. ed (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1997). 1.

²⁵⁰ Cone *God of the Oppressed*. 2.

²⁵¹ Bethune, Mary, McLeod. 2006. “What Does American Democracy Mean To Me?” In *Great Speeches by African Americans: Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Barack Obama, and Others*, edited by James Daley, 109-110. Mineola, New York: Dover.

house bound, in nursing homes, in hospice or otherwise. It is a time for calling out the names and families of youngsters who have achieved some accomplishment. It is like the social media platform of community information, news and celebration. In such an environment, in addition to the praise and worship of almighty God the people are uplifted in ways that belie what many have come to believe, in so many ways, about their massive shortcomings. Worship is a time of hearing not only the word of God proclaimed, not only a time for praying and singing, but also a time to share in the lives of each other. It is a time of learning, “I am somebody in the eyes of a benevolent God and because of that, “I am somebody” in my own eyes and in the view of others within my community.

The Black Power movement burst into being in the 1960s and was a strident call for an end to the disenfranchisement of black people. For many the cry for obtaining freedom by any means necessary clashed with the more sedate inclinations of the Christian black Church extolling the twins of love and mercy and the peace of God. As Cone observed, black theologians were in a dilemma of whether to abandon Black Power and join whites in condemnation or accept Black Power as a socio-political expression of the truth of the gospel.²⁵² According to Anthony Richard Roberts,

The Black Power movement of the 1960s and James H. Cone’s liberation theology are ideological expressions of the African American will to resist oppression that find a synthesis with one another, resulting in a theological anthropology which constructs human nature through the melding of Black militancy, religious experience, and culture.²⁵³

²⁵² James H. Cone, “BLACK THEOLOGY AND THE BLACK CHURCH: Where Do We Go From Here?,” *CrossCurrents* 27, no. 2 (1977): 147–56, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24458316>.

²⁵³ Anthony Roberts, ““Say It Loud!”: Black Power Ideology within the Theological Anthropology of James H. Cone,” accessed March 4, 2019,

From the idea of Black Power, the people gained a sense of pride in themselves that served to deny and erase much of the self-defeating beliefs such as self-hate and the acceptance that they were in fact an inferior race. Black Power led to greater pride in the physical characteristics that distinguished them from the dominant society. In a very special way Cone was successful in melding the more positive sense of self in the Black Power movement with a contemporary view of the gospel of Jesus Christ as being targeted to the underprivileged and therefore those who are black. Cone argued that “God has chosen black people!”²⁵⁴ He is quick to caution that white people are not excluded from God’s favor because, “Being black in America has little to do with skin color. Being black means that your heart, your soul, your mind, and your body are where the dispossessed are.”²⁵⁵ All people thereby, are capable of membership in the family of ‘blackness’ and all people as children of God are due and entitled to forgiveness.

Forgiveness

The biblical admonitions clearly enjoin me to forgive. The words of Jesus on the cross, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”²⁵⁶ calls for the same kind of sentiment from blacks, even as Christians who encounter racist actions. I am instructed to forgive in unlimited measure, “seventy times seven,” as the gospel of Matthew tells us.²⁵⁷ There are many more biblical appeals to forgiveness. Suffice it to add one more which Jesus is said to postulate, “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”²⁵⁸ This call to

http://www.academia.edu/12060607/Say_It_Loud_Black_Power_Ideology_within_the_Theological_Anthropology_of_James_H._Cone.

²⁵⁴ James H. Cone, *Black Theology & Black Power*, Reprint edition (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1997). 151.

²⁵⁵ Cone, James H., *Black Theology & Black Power*. 151.

²⁵⁶ Luke 23:34. (NRSV)

²⁵⁷ Matthew 18:21-22 (NRSV)

²⁵⁸ Matthew 6:14-15 (NRSV)

forgiveness suggests that it ought to be a vital part of Christian living after all, it is embedded in the prayer Jesus taught, when asked how to pray, as “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”²⁵⁹ Be that as it may, it is not an easy matter to live up to in light of earthly experiences.

When military chaplains and others begin to look at how they might assist soldiers in alleviating their burdens with moral injury the subject of forgiveness rises high in consideration. Forgiveness is described theologically as a “letting go” which stems from the Greek *aphesis*. It is, “Pardoning or remitting an offense. It restores a good relationship with God, others, or the self after sin or alienation.”²⁶⁰ There will be occasions where a combatant makes a particular decision, on his or her own, or based on an order from a superior, to perform a task that is contrary to a moral understanding. In order to forestall resultant issues with shame, guilt, self-hate, and grief, finding ways to forgive oneself and others is crucial. Researcher Natalie Purcell and her colleagues contend that, “In our work, we have found that the core components of the self-forgiveness process—accepting responsibility, cultivating self-compassion, making amends, and reconstructing an intact moral identity—are near-universal steps on the pathway through and beyond moral guilt.”²⁶¹ Purcell describes here, the application of forgiveness with respect to military personnel. In so doing, while acknowledging that forgiveness, and self-forgiveness in particular, are crucial against soul injuries, she points out that it implies harm done which is not always obtrusive. Given this fact, it should be clear that it may not apply in non-military

²⁵⁹ Matthew 6:12 (NRSV) (Some say trespasses and trespassers instead of debts and debtors.)

²⁶⁰ Donald K. McKim, *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms, Second Edition: Revised and Expanded* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2014). 107.

²⁶¹ Natalie Purcell et al., “‘Opening a Door to a New Life’: The Role of Forgiveness in Healing From Moral Injury,” *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 9 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2018.00498>.

situations such as to those who are on the receiving end of a wound, she or he may not have initiated.

In terms of a black person the hurts are not ambiguous. In terms of a black person who is aggrieved, for whom would forgiveness be a healing? On the other hand, there may be some similarity, say for example, if the persecuted might experience relief by forgiving the persecutor. Stories of forgiveness abound in which grieving persons forgive and receive relief by absolving others who have harmed them or their families. The lesson comes to us in the case of the Amish at Nickle Mines, Pennsylvania who showed up at the funeral of the man who murdered their children and hugged his wife in solace.²⁶² It is a wonderful story worthy of tears of joy and thankfulness. Observe, however, that the prevailing assumption which surfaced that the Amish had gotten over the tragedy was a false one. In their tradition they have come to understand that the truth of the notion, “that because the Amish can express that forgiveness, and because they hold no grudges, they are better able to concentrate on the work of their own healing.”²⁶³ The lesson is further taught in the forgiveness relatives of slain loved ones declare after the deaths at the hands of Dylann Roof.²⁶⁴ To be clear, these acts of forgiveness did not release the Amish parents or community from grief. Nor did it release the relatives in Charleston. Even so, the act is a freeing for all of them because as Purcell continues, “We speak of forgiveness as a process of emotional growth, release, and transformation that can facilitate reconciliation in the aftermath of

²⁶² Joseph Shapiro, “Amish Forgive School Shooter, Struggle with Grief,” *NPR.Org*, October 2, 2007, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=14900930>.

²⁶³ Jonas Beiler. Quoted in Joseph Shapiro, “Amish Forgive School Shooter, Struggle with Grief,” *NPR.Org*, October 2, 2007, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=14900930>.

²⁶⁴ Mark Berman, “‘I Forgive You.’ Relatives of Charleston Church Shooting Victims Address Dylann Roof,” *Washington Post*, June 19, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2015/06/19/i-forgive-you-relatives-of-charleston-church-victims-address-dylann-roof/>.

a significant moral violation. It is an active, morally-engaged process that requires both acceptance *and* change.”²⁶⁵

The bearer of a moral injury may also have a need to forgive herself or himself for desiring retribution and in some cases for a desire to return violence for violence received. I have found in my own experience that if I do not aggressively attack an aggravation and seek some redress, it lingers with me and leaves me with the anxiety of unfinished business.

It would be tempting to leave the discussion on forgiveness at this point. Having shown that there is a difference between forgiveness of oneself in the military environment for acts leading to moral wounds and those wounds received at the hands of another; but there is more.

Black Forgiveness

The expression of mercy, forgiveness and generosity of those who have forgiven others as discussed is compelling. The heart is warmed by such acts of human kindness and love. Yet the very issue is subject to scrutiny as in the question, *Why Do We Expect Victims of Racism to Forgive?* boldly raised by Hanif Abdurraqib.²⁶⁶ He wonders which if any party is positively served when the receiver of harm absolves the perpetrator. He argues that acts of forgiveness in situations of a racist nature only take care of a nation that is overly concerned with graciousness. What he fails to share at that point, however, is that in reality,

Forgiveness does not mean lack of accountability. To accept forgiveness is an acknowledgement of guilt. To receive forgiveness requires repentance, which includes restitution and some assurance that the offense will not be repeated. In the case of the racism, rarely are these two requirements met.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ Purcell, “Opening a Door to a New Life.”

²⁶⁶ Hanif Abdurraqib, “Why Do We Expect Victims of Racism to Forgive?,” *Pacific Standard*, November 1, 2018, <https://psmag.com/social-justice/why-do-we-expect-victims-of-racism-to-forgive>.

²⁶⁷ Darryl W. Stephens, comment to author, April 4, 2019.

The very act of forgiveness therefore, as it may be proffered by victims of racism could bring about good guilt so to speak, that fosters regret and a desire to desist. Such a development may have a salutary effect on the overall effort to begin the necessary healing and reconciliation for all.

In recounting several racial confrontations in the news, Abdurraqib does show how well the nation responds to the reactions of family and friends in the Charleston case in support of his theses. Following that he extols the reaction of Jeremiah Harvey a nine-year-old black boy who was accused of sexual assault by a white woman. In a narrow passageway by the cash register in a grocery store Harvey's backpack had brushed the woman's backside and that was when, in anger she charged him, and the police were summoned. Instead of forgiving the woman Harvey declined when asked on an ABC program "The interviewer asked if Harvey forgave Klein for what she'd put him through. He replied succinctly: "I don't forgive her. I think she needs help.""²⁶⁸ This response pleases because failure to forgive does not equate to desiring harm but prevents the offender from feeling absolved and thus going away free. Abdurraqib concludes,

It is unavoidable to mention that these expectations of forgiveness are often drawn along racial lines, in situations where there are black victims of a white offender; again, the praise thrust on the family members who forgave Roof in Charleston comes to mind. This expectation feels fueled by a perverse need to see harmed people demonstrate nobility—because that's how we can believe the myths that political suffering builds character, and that righteousness rather than power will inevitably triumph. But it's an unfair expectation. The desire to see black Americans show forgiveness is a desire to avoid fully

²⁶⁸ Abdurraqib, Hanif, "Why Do We Expect Victims of Racism to Forgive?"

reckoning with black pain, or the lingering effects of trauma that do not serve the public performance as cleanly.²⁶⁹

Similarly, Ta-Nehisi Coates, speaking on the subject of blacks forgiving whites for wounds rendered declares, “These people are not noble. To the contrary, they have always been coldly opportunistic. They are forgiving because they have common sense. They are forgiving because they do not have the weaponry to be any other way.”²⁷⁰ Coates argues that over all the years of abuse black people have been responding with prayer and hymns. Some fewer passive engagements need to be made but the fact of the matter is that blacks do not have enough to carry on a sustained revolt.

Some would say that black people have been forgiving for too long and that it connotes a kind of weakness, the sort of “go along to get along” attitude that has hampered the goal of freedom for ages. “Nobody forgives people with more expediency than black Christians,” asserts Ulysses Burley. “It’s what we’ve been taught to do; but it’s been a disguised forgiveness – not as a forgiveness for our sake, but for the sake of others.”²⁷¹ It is a cheap form of forgiveness I would venture to proffer. Somewhat the equivalent of a cheap grace in Christian circles it is a forgiveness accepted absent any desire to be repentant and to mobilize a significant change in behavior.

Black Power advocates and others not nearly so militant have been bolstered by the words of, “by any means necessary” brought to the fore during the Civil Rights years by

²⁶⁹ Abdurraqib, Hanif, “Why Do We Expect Victims of Racism to Forgive?”

²⁷⁰ Ta-Nehisi Coates, “Why Are Black People So Forgiving?,” The Atlantic, October 6, 2010, <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2010/10/why-are-black-people-so-forgiving/64129/>.

²⁷¹ Ulysses Burley III, “Black Forgiveness,” The Salt Collective, November 23, 2015, <http://thesaltcollective.org/black-forgiveness-2/>.

Malcolm X.²⁷² The stance promotes strength and a self, involved in its own prerogatives. For Cornell West forgiveness adheres to the theme raised here. He contends as quoted by Burley,

That when we talk about forgiveness, you notice how quick the white press wants to accent Black people forgiving. Forgiveness is not an utterance. It's a process. We are a loving people. We've taught the world so much about love because we've been hated so, but to forgive a day or so after...something's wrong with that – that's a twisted sympathy and a pathological empathy – you forgive as you have worked it through – You just make sure you don't hate. That's the key. Don't hate. Forgiveness comes later. But the press wants to accent forgiveness – we are a fighting people as well as a forgiving people.²⁷³

This argument from the sociopolitical angle is compelling and I recommend that the precepts of Jesus be followed in such a way that it brings hope to the wounded and at the same time promotes resolve to change relationships. It is said that, “We are so quick to implore people of color to forgive and too slow to hold white people to full accountability. Racism, however, cannot be tidied up or cleansed without repentance, change and restitution —matters that are much harder than apologizing and receiving forgiveness.”²⁷⁴

I conclude that forgiving oneself is paramount in forgiving others and that what is being done on behalf of the military to temper the scourge of moral injury through the power of forgiveness is on target. When it comes to the alleviation of wounds of black people, however, some work for better understanding needs to be implemented. The child Jeremiah Harvey, after all, on a subsequent news program when “Asked whether he forgave Klein,” his accuser, “he

²⁷² Malcolm X, *By Any Means Necessary* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1992).

²⁷³ Burley, Ulysses III, Black Forgiveness.

²⁷⁴ Brandi Miller, “White People Owe Us An Apology, But We Don't Owe Them Forgiveness,” *Huffington Post*, October 21, 2018, sec. Opinion, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/opinion-white-apology-black-forgiveness_us_5bccda8ce4b055bc9481ea68.

said, “Yes, yes, I do. Friendship is the key.””²⁷⁵ Even as a child he had reconsidered the incident and chosen friendship. Despite arguments to the contrary it appears that forgiveness is essential in easing wounds of the soul whether from the view of the oppressor or the victim.

My concern is that forgiveness on the part of blacks should not be quickly rendered as has been observed. There ought to be a period prior to allow for anger to be felt and quieted somewhat because it is an important stage in the process of healing. Joshua Lazard goes so far as to formulate a Theology of Anger. He does so because he believes that, “Forgiveness for white supremacy derails action and alienates young black activists.”²⁷⁶ Nevertheless, he and others quoted herein cannot help but conclude that as Christians we must forgive and that forgiveness from the heart of the victim must be accompanied not so much with an apology from the wrongdoer but with repentance, a change of mind and deed. James Cone supporting the far-reaching consequences of forgiving with the case of the Emanuel AME shooting was,

It’s victory out of defeat. It is the weak overcoming the strong. It’s ‘You can’t destroy my spirit. I have a forgiving spirit because that’s what God created me to be. You are not going to destroy that.’ When they forgive, it is a form of resistance, a kind of resilience. It is not bowing down. That is misunderstood by a lot of people, even black people, and even some black ministers. It’s part of that tragic experience of trying to express your humanity in the face of death and not having any power.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁵ Sara Boboltz, “9-Year-Old Falsely Accused Of Groping White Woman Says He ‘Felt Humiliated,’” *Huffington Post*, October 19, 2018, sec. U.S. News, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/9-year-old-falsely-accused-of-groping-says-he-felt-humiliated_us_5bc9e26fe4b0d38b58776994.

²⁷⁶ Joshua L. Lazard, “A Theology of Anger: Forgiveness For White Supremacy Derails Action and Alienates Young Black Activists,” *Religion Dispatches*, July 6, 2015, <http://religiondispatches.org/a-theology-of-anger-forgiveness-for-white-supremacy-derails-action-and-alienates-young-black-activists/>.

²⁷⁷ Cone, James. Quoted in David Remnick, “After Charleston,” September 21, 2015, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/09/28/blood-at-the-root>.

It is a powerful statement full of the history of the black experience in thralldom, without resources, capable mostly of maintaining hope in a transcendent savior who calls for and demonstrates forgiveness.

Theological Reflections

It is an acceptable truism that the Christian religion has served to gladden the hearts, minds, and souls of black people in the Americas throughout their presence in the western world. From the outset it was the Black Church that sustained the enslaved who appropriated the essence from those who coopted their pitiful lives. The black church was spawned from the racism and dehumanization within the crucible of chattel slavery. It was severely denounced by white slavers and others who feared that it might lead to the greater desire for freedom. “As one slave recounted “the white folks would come in when the colored people would have prayer meeting and whip every one of them. Most of them thought that when colored people were praying it was against them.”²⁷⁸ Indeed, it did contribute greatly to thoughts of freedom as expressed in spirituals, but it served also as a means of building up resistance to debasement, and in solidifying a sense of community. Jeremiah Wright, affirms,

The spirituals, the folklore, the sermons, and the testimonies from the period of the transatlantic slave trade provide a wealth of additional evidence of psychological resistance to slavery and the Africans’ absolute refusal to give that kind of power to those who called themselves “slaveholders” or “slave owners.” The spiritual

²⁷⁸ ““The Black Church,’ a Brief History,” African American Registry, accessed February 28, 2019, <https://aaregistry.org/story/the-black-church-a-brief-history/>.

‘I told Jesus it would be alright if He changed my name’ stands in direct and defiant opposition to the notion that a European slaveholder had the right to change an African’s name.²⁷⁹

Despite the strength gained from adherence to God talk it is not hidden that the black church struggles with the challenging concern with theodicy. Allan Boesak begins an essay on the subject by claiming based upon his reading of Cone, that “For black theology it was never just the colossal reality of evil that constituted the problem of theodicy. It was always the fact that the reality of suffering and evil challenged the faith affirmation that God is liberating the oppressed from human captivity.”²⁸⁰

Sustenance was drawn from God’s work in the emancipation of the Israelites from the Egyptians but instead of a passive oppressed they sought to participate in their own rescue when they thought it was feasible. Insurrection failed on many occasions, but the promise of the mercy and goodness of God was held before them like the welcome sight of the biblical lighthouse sending a bright beam guiding towards rescue, freedom and salvation. In the presence of this ‘light,’ “The black church has not only nurtured black people but enabled them to survive brutalities that ought not to have been inflicted on any community of men.”²⁸¹

Dennis Wiley introduces the idea that before the 1960s there existed an “...historical, homegrown, unsystematic black theology...”²⁸² Subsequent to the black power movement “...the

²⁷⁹ Wright, Jeremiah. 2012. “Protestant ecclesiology.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology*, edited by Dwight N. Hopkins and Edward P. Antonio, 184-197. New York: Cambridge University Press.

²⁸⁰ Boesak, Allan. 2012. “Theodicy: “De Lawd knowed how it was.” Black Theology and black suffering.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology*, edited by Dwight N. Hopkins and Edward P. Antonio, 156-168. New York: Cambridge University Press.

²⁸¹ James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, eds., *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, 2nd ed., rev. vol. 1, 2 vols. (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1993). 37.

²⁸² Wiley, Dennis. 2012. “God.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology*, Cambridge Companions to Religion, edited by Dwight N. Hopkins and Edward P. Antonio, 75-93. New York: Cambridge University Press.

contemporary, academic, systematic black theology (that) emerged in response to it.”²⁸³ I would argue that the more soul felt non-academic, unsystematic version of the black church continues in concert with the newer version even while the newer version is still influencing the old. Rising up to protest the slings and arrows that are let fly into the black body, and spills the black blood, the Black church follows inexorably in the footsteps of Christ Jesus to make amends.

Questions for Follow-up

While I have argued for and made the case that it is appropriate to situate the application of moral injury as a harbinger of the suffering black people face at the hand of racism, I recognize it may more readily be applied to the perpetrator. That thought is certainly worthy of attention which might become a hypothesis to be tested empirically. To that end a good question might be, Is the construct of Moral Injury more properly placed on the white establishment upon whom the appellation of oppressor is assigned rather than on blacks who form the ranks of the oppressed? The very fact that moral injuries are the result of having committed an act or having been forced to commit an act against one’s moral beliefs is reason enough to engage the question. What must it be like to accept Christian, other religious and even atheistic sureties to then act against them with impunity? I would expect it to be injurious to go against a belief in the *imago Dei*, humans made in the image of God,²⁸⁴ or to ignore the statement from the Declaration of Independence, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”²⁸⁵ I suspect, should I investigate the question that the answer might surface that both entities are feeling the pain, the one in grief and the other in

²⁸³ (Wiley 2012, 75)

²⁸⁴ Genesis 1: 26-28

²⁸⁵ *The Constitution of the United States: With Index and the Declaration of Independence*, Cong.

shame. Is that the way it is in fact? All citizens are deeply hurt by moral injuries and are way overdue for spiritual attention.

The legacy of Moral Injury may well be the attention and opportunity for redress it has brought and may bring to the improvement of the lives of many citizens. Among the possible presence of moral injury in a variety of places in the public domain from a short list are, Emergency Medical Technicians, Police, Nurses, Doctors, and those everyday people who languish because of everyday instances of death, divorce, job loss and grievous illness, to name a few. In this regard a number of investigators are currently asking questions and observing conditions. I would object strenuously against calling moral injury a mental illness if only because that has yet to be established and pronounced viable, and the prospect of sedating and relegating hordes of people to asylums on account of moral injury is unthinkable. Besides, not all respond in the same way to the symptoms of moral injury.

Following, a second question is, if black people in America suffer from moral injury what sort of large-scale effort would be required to alleviate the damage? Despite the fact that the nation can always find funding for a war, social problems are severely underfunded. Therefore, “the cost would be prohibitive,” I can hear people object. Would such a project be considered as reparations as promulgated by Ta Nehisi Coates?²⁸⁶ While requests for reparations are usually thought of in terms of compensatory payment it could be applied to the healing of wounds. A guarantee, for argument’s sake, that perhaps an emergency proclamation be made to acknowledge and denounce racism and the social morass it engenders? In addition, should such soul repair be instituted and if Transgenerational epigenetic inheritance is confirmed, would such payments or moral rectitude endure until the end of time?

²⁸⁶ Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations,” *The Atlantic*, June 2014, accessed March 4, 2019. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>.

I find myself being curious and therefore raise the question of how to go about distinguishing the normal everyday stress factors humans encounter from those attributable to moral injury. A solution to this problem would be a profound addition to our understanding of how to treat and take care of ourselves. Tremendous other contributions would also be realized.

One salient matter that has been rearing its head throughout the confines of this project but has not been given any attention is the often-declared accusations of concupiscence, moral depravity and other antisocial habits ascribed to the dispossessed. There is evidence that poverty, educational deprivation, substandard housing and other social ills result in large measure from racist foundations. The study of crime in the black community, unfortunate encounters with the police, may all be associated with moral injury endured. Domestic abuse, suicidal ideation, black-on-black crime, murder, and other ills are all suitable for scrutiny through the lens of Moral Injury.

Black Liberation Theology and Womanist theology are doing well in providing contemporary God Talk that helps to lead blacks toward redemption, salvation and the propensity to forgive. Despite that fact, blacks continue to ask, “Why are we still living in wretched conditions when God could end this evil thing with one righteous stroke?”²⁸⁷ Shelly Rambo offers, “But what we’re beginning to see is that traumatic events don’t end. Traumas are moving—and we could say bleeding—into other traumas. We don’t see a clear end to a suffering event but instead a kind of overflowing of suffering.”²⁸⁸ The truth of Rambo’s statement is extremely important, and her work will have much import in the quest for cogent answers to suffering and the role of God. Perhaps that question could be pursued if not to perfect

²⁸⁷ James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues*: (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995). 53.

²⁸⁸ “Shelly Rambo: Studying Suffering, Trauma and Resurrection,” Duke Divinity School, accessed April 26, 2019, <https://www.faithandleadership.com/shelly-rambo-space-between-death-and-resurrection>.

understanding then to the point of some comfort on a bar high enough to acknowledge that, all women and men are created equal. Created by a God incarnated as Jesus the Christ, who came to earth and reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah while in the synagogue said,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.²⁸⁹

It is this Jesus and these captives that compel James Cone to inform and assert,

Jesus Christ is not a proposition, not a theological concept which exists merely in our heads. He is an event of liberation, a happening in the lives of oppressed people struggling for political freedom. Therefore, to know him is to encounter him in the history of the weak and the helpless. That is why it can be rightly said that there can be no knowledge of Jesus independent of the history and culture of the oppressed. It is impossible to interpret the Scripture correctly and thus understand Jesus aright unless the interpretation is done in the light of the consciousness of the oppressed in their struggle for liberation.²⁹⁰

In this project I attempted a short "history of the weak and helpless"²⁹¹ in the hope that Jesus may be more present, and scripture more rightly understood "...in the light of the consciousness of the oppressed in their struggle for liberation."²⁹² May the stories be told in educational settings and may the Church take the lead because the Church is the most excellent place from which healing may come. And may chaplains, and ministers, caregivers and the general public alike

²⁸⁹ Luke 4: 18-19, (NRSV).

²⁹⁰ James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, Rev. ed (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1997). 32.

²⁹¹ Cone, James, *God of the Oppressed*. 32.

²⁹² Cone, James, *God of the Oppressed*. 32.

converse together in like-minded accord and determination to end, once and for all the scourge of the racist weapon of choice by the privileged and supremacists who hold sway.

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