Racism and the Image of God
K. Teel
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Racism and the Image of God

Karen Teel

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Contents

Acknowledgments vii

1 Racism as a Christian Problem 1
2 Racism as a White Problem 15
3 Racism as a Theological Problem 37
4 Combat Breathing: Katie Geneva Cannon 53
5 Surrogacy and Survival: Delores S. Williams 77
6 The Color of Christianity: Kelly Brown Douglas 99
7 Shoulder to Shoulder: M. Shawn Copeland 121
8 Dismantling Evil: Emilie M. Townes 143
9 One Body at a Time 161

Notes 173
Bibliography 191
Index 203

10.1057/9780230114715 - Racism and the Image of God, Karen Teel

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1

Racism as a Christian Problem

> “The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want!”
>
> I had heard this psalm sung many times before. But this was different.
>
> “The Lord is my shepherd: I *shall not* want! He makes me lie down in green pastures…”
>
> In the white churches of my past, this psalm was intoned serenely, as though reflecting a present security and peace. Now the words rose up as a cry to God.
>
> “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me…”
>
> Throbbing with anguish, the black woman’s passionate voice yet resonated with a determined hope and trust.
>
> “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forevermore!”
>
> This was no casual assurance of one waiting comfortably for her eventual reward, but an urgent demand for justice. *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want*: in the end, God, you *will* fulfill these promises.

Attending mostly white churches when I was growing up, I sensed that many people were there because they thought they ought to be. Some, sincerely devout, tried to live according to their faith during the week as well. Nevertheless, attending church remained a matter of choice and even a point of pride. Our family, I understood without being told, went regularly not only because my parents believed in God and wanted to raise us children to be faithful Catholics, but also because going to church was what virtuous people did. In my sheltered faith, I trusted that the comforts I enjoyed in this life would be exponentially greater in the next.

10.1057/9780230114715 - Racism and the Image of God, Karen Teel

For some time now, however, I have been attending a mostly black church, and it seems to me that many of the people come for something more than a sense of duty, pride, or virtue. The trust they express in song and prayer is no complacent expectation of greener pastures in heaven. Their faith rages against injustices endured for generations, urging God to make haste to deliver them from the shadow of death. These Christians do not come to church to fulfill an obligation; they come for the strength to make a way out of no way. These sisters and brothers are teaching me that if I am not relying on my faith to get me through the week, then I need to get my priorities straight.

Thinking about Racism

What does it mean to be a white Christian in the United States, and how is it different from being a black Christian? People like me, those of European descent, have had a comparatively easy time in the United States. But oppression is a common feature of African Americans' experiences of life in this country. Slavery, segregation, and racism make up a pernicious trajectory in which the humanity of an entire people has been consistently denied. Racism pervades both society and religion, including Christian churches. Neither the secular belief in human equality—"all men are created equal"—nor the Christian teaching that all are created in God's image has prevented this evil. On the contrary, perverted and inadequate forms of these beliefs have been used to justify it. Secular laws and mainstream religious doctrines now declare the equality of all people, yet racism is still a huge problem—a problem European Americans, especially Christians, need to face. Why did Christian theology not only fail to prevent the institution of slavery from developing, but also actively support it? And why has the belief that every human being is created in the image of God still not eliminated racism for good?

In this book, I argue that a primary reason for this failure is the ambivalence Christianity has long maintained toward human bodies. Throughout history, in Christianity's articulation of the notion of the human person as made in the image and likeness of God, the body has functioned in a highly ambiguous way. On the one hand, the early and decisive Christian affirmation of the Incarnation of Jesus as truly human, including his human body, established a positive view of embodiment and physical matter as divinely created and inherently good. On the other hand, due largely to the influence of Greek philosophy, Christianity has often vilified the human body, attributing to it many vices and few virtues. The result has been disastrous: Christianity's historical ambiguity toward the body has made it dangerously easy to dismiss some individual persons and groups of people as less human than others, based on the kinds of bodies people have.

Christian ambivalence toward strangers has taken various forms over the centuries, but it is rooted in the Bible itself. In the Hebrew scriptures, the Israelites often act as though only Hebrews, not outsiders, have equal status as human persons. At times, God even commands the destruction of non-Hebrew groups who are deterring the Hebrews from accomplishing their purpose. For example, in the Hebrews' quest for freedom from the Egyptians, Pharaoh's army is drowned in the sea. Also, in the struggle for what is to be the Israelites' homeland, several groups fall victim to the sword. Numbers 31 contains a chilling account of cultural genocide in which the Hebrews kill all the Canaanite men and enslave the women; the book of Joshua contains a similar account of ethnic cleansing. One scholar explains that the strangers must be destroyed because, in presenting other gods as viable candidates for worship, these people threaten Israel's identity as the people of the covenant.[1] Racial purity is deeply connected with Israel's identity and relationship to the divine. Yet once the nation is established, God repeatedly commands Israel to welcome the stranger and care for the widow and the orphan, calling upon the people to remember their own bondage in Egypt.[2]

The Christian scriptures continue this tension in their lively debates over who is to be granted membership in the Christian community and in their unquestioned acceptance of slavery as a social institution. For example, Paul's letter to Philemon concerning the slave Onesimus demonstrates that Paul took slavery for granted. To ask for the emancipation of a slave—even one who has been granted membership in the Christian community and whom Paul considers his spiritual son and brother—is to request a favor, not to assert a natural right.

More broadly, slavery and inequality have always been part of human society. For example, although Western culture celebrates the Greeks as the founders of democracy, those aristocratic Greeks had extensive leisure time for philosophizing and voting only because they relied on slaves to do the physical labor of the society.[3] Certainly, European Christians throughout history have considered outsider groups such as Jews and Muslims to be inferior to themselves, even

10.1057/9780230114715 - Racism and the Image of God, Karen Teel

when they did not enslave them. Western culture still subscribes more to the notion of the Great Chain of Being, with its gradations of value of all creatures, than to the notion of universal human dignity.[4]

The United States was built on one of the most oppressive forms of slavery in human history. Though Christians and non-Christians alike are guilty of racism, we cannot deny that Christians of European descent played a central role in instituting and perpetuating this evil. European Christians founded the Atlantic slave trade. The European Christian and Deist founders of the United States codified race-based slavery into law, and their descendants protected the domestic slave trade until the late nineteenth century. They used the Bible to advocate perpetual enslavement even for Africans who became Christians, making the "good news" of Jesus very bad news indeed. After slavery ended, one hundred years passed before African Americans were able to attain the full rights of citizens. Most U.S. residents now repudiate racism, and we try to combat it with public programs like affirmative action and personal strategies such as "not noticing skin color." But in the absence of a seismic shift in the attitudes that underlay centuries of slavery and segregation, these approaches can accomplish only so much. Slavery, segregation, and racism constitute a history so vile that it has been called the "dark side of the American dream."[5]

It seems that we of European descent have always thought of some people, usually ourselves, as more human than others. This bias is no less troubling for the fact that it may also be found in other cultures and groups. In our case, scholars have documented the fact that since power has conventionally resided in the hands of European men, white women and male and female members of non-European groups have suffered as a result. Contemporary racism, then, is not a new problem but the current manifestation of a very old one, ugly and depraved. Where are white Christians in this valley of injustice? What roles do we play—wittingly or unwittingly—in perpetuating the evil of racism? How are we also threatened by it? Rather than ignoring it in the hope that it will go away, can we take action to end it?

If we are serious about finding answers to these questions, we can best start by doing something many white Americans are often—and understandably—reluctant to do: we can face up honestly to the fact of racism. What is racism and how does it work? In the United States, racism is commonly understood in two ways.[6] First, racism can be a personal problem, enacted in the thoughts and actions of individuals. In this sense, racism manifests itself as particular events of discrimination based on (perceived) skin color. Personal racism may be better described as “discrimination” or “prejudice,” and it can occur in any direction, so that while it includes white people discriminating against people of color, a person of color can also discriminate against another person of color or a white person. Second, racism exists in the structures of U.S. society, offering benefits to one group and disadvantages to others according to perceived skin color. Beverly Daniel Tatum describes this as “a system of advantage based on race.”[7] According to this system, people of European descent receive certain unearned advantages that people of color are denied. Peggy McIntosh documents this phenomenon in her well-known article “Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack.” For example, white people can usually arrange to be around people of their race, protect their children from those who might not like them, and find bandages that match their skin color.[8] White people receive these advantages whether they want to or not, so another name for this system is “white privilege.” Studies consistently show that, unlike racism as discrimination, racism as a system of advantage usually works in favor of people with light or “white” skin.[9] Indeed, sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva argues that claiming not to notice skin color—when we certainly do—results in a peculiar phenomenon he names “racism without racists.” Here the system of white advantage is perpetuated even while we white people claim to be innocent of personal acts of discrimination.[10] In my experience, many European Americans are familiar with the first type of racism, but we tend to deny the existence of the second until offered ample proof. This only highlights the desperate need for an open dialogue about racism in the white community.

Of course, although racism is often discussed in terms of white-black relations, members of many racial and ethnic groups suffer from both personal and structural racism in the United States, not to mention around the world. Each history is unique, and it is not my intention to minimize these varied experiences. Structural racism as white supremacy does not exhaustively describe structural racism in the United States. Theologian Rubén Rosario Rodríguez, pointing out that structural racism also occurs within and among nonwhite groups, cautions us that “there is something imperialistic and paternalistic about any view of humanity that treats the victims of oppression as less than human by denying them the capacity to act as sinfully as their oppressors.”[11] Nevertheless, this book focuses on European American racism against African Americans because, despite the election of the first black U.S. president, black-white relations remain iconic of racial struggles in the United States, and a great deal of theology has been written on them, providing a solid foundation on which to build. A more adequate Christian understanding of the body, one that will compel us to respect rather than fear those we perceive to be "not like us," will benefit not only black and white but all interpersonal relations.

M. Shawn Copeland states, "No Christian teaching has been more desecrated by slavery than the doctrine of the human person or theological anthropology."[12] Copeland rightly assumes that in a properly constructed Christian theological anthropology—or understanding of what it means to be human—all persons are considered equal in dignity before God and each other. But only recently, and still imperfectly, has it come to mean this. The idea that being created in God's image confers a special dignity on each human person is still much contested, even though it has always been part of the Jewish and Christian traditions and a distorted version of it informed the founding of the United States. Indeed, it appears that the doctrine of the image of God as Copeland understands it has been so countercultural that it has never really been practiced. In confronting the intransigence of racism, this book not only depends upon but also argues for a specific interpretation of the image of God, one that sees all persons as equal in dignity and demands respect for all human bodies, precisely in our similarities and differences.

Why Womanist Theologies?

Whether or not we like to admit it, European Americans know that racism still ravages our nation. Although segregation was outlawed in the 1960s, the centuries-old racist attitudes of many will not be dislodged simply by the passing of laws. We need more creative approaches to curing this disease.

One of the most sophisticated and subtle approaches to changing the way white Americans think about black people has found expression within the discipline of Christian theology. The racist exploitation of bodies in the United States is nowhere more clear than in the experiences of black women. Through slavery, segregation, and racism, black women have been victimized on account of their race, sex, class, and more. Yet, as shown by authors such as Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker, black women's history is not limited to the vagaries of oppression; it also reveals a stunningly resilient capacity for love and joy. Since the 1970s, black women in the United States have been reflecting on their experiences as a source for

10.1057/9780230114715 - Racism and the Image of God, Karen Teel

theology, and some have adopted the title "womanist"[13] to describe this work. Womanist theologies have developed in the context of black people's history in the United States as well as in dialogue with black and feminist theologies. They offer abundant resources toward a transformation of Christian anthropology. This book takes womanist theology as a logical place—though not the only one—to begin a critique and reconstruction of Christian theology of the body.

How do womanist theologians begin to provide an answer to our question about the body and the image of God? Womanist theologians consider theologically the intertwining factors of race, gender, class, and other factors—including but not limited to sexual orientation, age, and disability—as they have functioned to oppress black women. A womanist theologian is not only a theologian; she may be simultaneously a systematician, ethicist, political theorist, churchwoman, minister, social critic, poet, and more. Womanist theology is often described as interdisciplinary because womanists refuse to do theology in isolation from its roots in human history and its ramifications for human living. They recognize that theology is always organically part of the whole of human life and reflective of it. Womanist theologies, then, engage traditional categories but cannot be reduced to them.

As of this writing, M. Shawn Copeland is the only "theologian who is black and a woman"[14] who has created a book-length theological anthropology. Copeland does not identify *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* as womanist. Nevertheless, its theological focus is also a central womanist concern: the history and status of black women's bodies in North America. In U.S. society, our bodies have always functioned to determine our place, and black people have never had the luxury of being able to ignore this. Unlike white Americans, who because of our privilege can forget that our bodies mark our social status and often dictate the opportunities that are open to us, black Americans are constantly reminded that their skin color directly affects their ordinary, day-to-day social interactions. Black women scholars examine this reality from many perspectives: theological assertions, political assumptions, reproductive expectations, educational opportunities, employment possibilities, and so on. Womanist theologians know, from their experiences as black American women, that the body is always a critical factor in human relationships, in both church and society.

I contend—and I believe most womanist theologians would agree—that our bodies should function as a positive aspect of our humanity, allowing us to serve God and neighbor more fully. Often, however, as is painfully evident in the history of African Americans, Native peoples, and others, we humans—especially humans of European descent—have imposed limitations on various bodies for sinful, sinister, or ignorant reasons. These limitations thwart people's ability to flourish as full human persons. The brutal legacy of discrimination against black bodies in the United States offers a primary example of the destructive power of a limiting view of bodies, one in which Christian churches have been complicit. This began in the seventeenth century with indentured servitude and slavery, and continues up until the present with racism and white supremacy. Christian womanist theologians deal directly with this legacy from the perspective of black women's experiences.

Additionally, from a global perspective, black women are among those persons most cruelly oppressed. The bodies of black women have been among the most marginalized of all human bodies, both in civil society and in religion. Christian womanist theologians address this when they speak about how Christianity has affected the ability of black women to flourish as human persons. They challenge Christianity's denigration of bodies, especially black bodies, through support of slavery and racism. They also retrieve and celebrate elements of Christianity that aid black women's flourishing. This book investigates what some of these theologians are thinking and writing about bodies in order to determine how their ideas can be helpful to Christians who are considering what it means to be bodies in the image of God.

In choosing to study womanist theologies for this book, I do not intend to dismiss the seriousness and bodily nature of the suffering and oppression of other groups of people, such as Native Americans, the Jews in the Holocaust, Rwandans in the 1994 genocide, or the people under attack in the Darfur region of Sudan. Rather, I explore womanist theologies because black women's experiences in North America, my own location, immediately make apparent that nowhere, not even in the United States, with its popular emphasis on freedom and human dignity, do people truly respect bodies. This becomes devastatingly clear when one considers the history of black women brought to this country in slavery, surviving through emancipation and segregation, and continuing to struggle against white supremacy and racism and related discriminations arising from gender, class, and other differences. Certainly, we need to engage in this deep listening with Latino/a, Native American, and Asian American theologies as well.

10.1057/9780230114715 - Racism and the Image of God, Karen Teel

Christian womanist theologians' ways of speaking about bodies represent a contemporary strain of thought that proves immensely fruitful in the Christian conversation about the body's role in the image of God. They do more than add another strand to the conversation. Of the various groups of theologians working today, womanist theologians speak most clearly of the limitations of traditional Christian understandings of the body and the need to move beyond them. They provide the seeds of a constructive theology of the body.

How Can a White Woman Do Womanist Theology?

What role should bodies play in Christian understanding of the human person as created in the image of God? I have suggested that the work of womanist theologians provides a sound basis from which to consider this question. As is well known, womanist theologians are black women who have experienced the dark side of U.S. society as victims of racism, sexism, classism, and other discriminations, and who critically reflect on these experiences and on the rich religious and cultural heritage of black Americans from a theological perspective. I, however, am of European American heritage, and in U.S. society I am always categorized as white. So, what am I doing working on womanist theologies?

I have fielded at least two variations of this question. First: since I am white, why does the theology of black women interest me? Second: since I am white, what right do I have to claim any expertise in womanist theologies? Of course, if I were working on the theology of Thomas Aquinas, it is unlikely that anyone would question either my motives or my ability to do so on the grounds that I am nothing like a thirteenth-century Dominican monk, though that is certainly the case! More to the point, I respond to these questions by saying that I study womanist theologies because their values are human values. As a theologian, I believe that I should be learning from all of my colleagues, not only those who "look like me." Womanist work is important not only because all people share some things in common, but also because we are different. Caution is vital: I must guard against claiming that I know how black women feel because I am also a woman, a simplistic assumption that was sometimes made by white women during the emergence of white feminist theology. Further, taking care to avoid misappropriating womanist insights is essential.[15] Finally, I claim neither to be a womanist nor to be producing womanist theology. I engage womanism from my own perspective as a European American, Roman Catholic, feminist, systematic theologian.

The womanist theologians with whom I have spoken and whose work I have read are eager for all scholars to engage their ideas, and they support the distinction I am making here. Womanist theologians and ethicists are still setting parameters for and developing the content of womanism even as they encourage non-womanists to critically engage their insights. For example, two of Stacey Floyd-Thomas's goals in her book on womanist ethical methodology are "to avoid the field [womanist studies or womanist thought] being marginalized as viable for exploration only by black women" and "to unearth these epistemological treasures so that students and scholars of all backgrounds can *do* womanism even if they cannot *be* womanists." Likewise, Karen Baker-Fletcher asserts, "*White women can learn from womanists and advocate womanism without being womanists*" (italics in the original). Diana Hayes hopes "that, in time, womanist would be adopted by all women as, unlike feminism, from its beginnings it has been a theology that attempts to deal holistically with issues of race, class, and gender (including sexual orientation)."[16] So, according to these thinkers, while I cannot and do not claim to *be* a womanist, it is not necessary for me to do so in order to *advocate* womanism.

Further, I suggest that I do know something about oppression because I am a woman in U.S. society. My whiteness confers privilege upon me, but I am also a victim of sexism. Black theologian Anthony Pinn identifies himself as an "oppressed-oppressor," because he is both black (oppressed) and male (oppressor).[17] My own position is similar to Pinn's in that my social location, that is, my socioeconomic status, education, historical background, religion, gender, and race, situates me as an "oppressed-oppressor" in U.S. society. Given the extreme privilege whiteness and Christian-ness confer, it is likely that I have benefited from the history of Christianity's traditional position of power more than I have suffered from its ill effects as a woman. Yet my own experiences of gender discrimination help me to understand that no one is free until all are free.

I do not undertake this work because womanist theologians cannot speak for themselves; anyone who encounters their arguments must appreciate their theological sophistication and elegance. Rather, I do it for two reasons: one, as a member of the oppressor group, I need to listen to black women in order to recognize the part I have played in their suffering, to repent that role, and to be transformed; and two, as a member of an oppressed group, I resonate with some of their insights. Ultimately, both as oppressor and as oppressed, I seek my own liberation in attending to the wisdom of womanist theologians.

Plan of the Book

This book seeks to begin a transformation of Christian anthropology so that it will take all bodies seriously as made in the image of God. Scripture and tradition demand a central place for the voices and concerns of people who are poor and marginalized in society. Honoring this demand, a priority sometimes called the "option for the poor," I join black women in lifting up their wisdom from beneath the underside of history[18] in order to develop an understanding of being human bodies that compels Christians to fight racism.

Theology is always contextual because all theologians have contexts. Accordingly, chapter 2 outlines the history of racism as a white problem in the United States, and chapter 3 discusses the theological conversation about racism up to this point. These chapters, informed by my own European American perspective, attempt to practice white self-reflectiveness in thinking about racism. In the subsequent chapters, I explore the work of five North American Christian womanist thinkers who illuminate the dark side of the history of Christian theology of the body and make implicit and explicit proposals for improvement. The theologians considered are Katie Geneva Cannon, Delores S. Williams, Kelly Brown Douglas, M. Shawn Copeland, and Emilie M. Townes.

Katie Geneva Cannon's work focuses in theological ethics. She considers how the ethics of black women must differ from those that white theologians have proposed, given the stark differences in our social situations. Her thorough history of black women in the United States gives a historical view of black women's bodies that also informs chapter 2. Resistance and survival of the forces that aim to dehumanize black women are important themes throughout Cannon's work. Her description of the defensive stance black women maintain to withstand white assault illustrates one way in which black women image God.

Delores S. Williams, primarily a systematic theologian, centers her work mainly on the problem of surrogacy as unique to black women. Surrogacy for Williams denotes the fact that black women have been forced to take on significant life burdens for white people, such as bearing their children and running their households. Hagar, a biblical character who faces both negative and positive outcomes of surrogacy, provides a basis for considering motherhood as a spiritual and theological experience. Williams's work frames the black body as receptacle for unwelcome and unhealthy things and ideas in U.S. history.

Kelly Brown Douglas, a systematic theologian, interrogates sexuality and the black church, with reference to HIV/AIDS and the problem of homophobia. Douglas examines the history of Christian theology of the body that made possible the devaluation of black bodies. Critiquing "platonized" Christianity—the body/soul dualism inherited from Greek philosophy—as the main culprit, she calls for a theological shift in attitudes toward the body as a necessary means to social and ecclesial change. Douglas gives a theological view of the history and status of black people's bodies, providing grounds for the shift in Christian theology of the body.

As mentioned above, the most sustained treatment of theological anthropology that attends to the history and status of black women's bodies is by systematician M. Shawn Copeland. Copeland shows how, throughout their history, black women have struggled toward freedom as complete human persons—freedom not only for their souls, but also for their bodies. They share this struggle with Jesus in his ministry, death, and resurrection. Connecting all oppressed bodies with Jesus's body, Copeland reveals that we each work out our own freedom, if not our salvation, in concrete practices of solidarity with oppressed bodies.

Emilie M. Townes, a womanist ethicist, focuses on the implications of suffering and hope in the experiences of black women, particularly in light of health-care issues such as HIV/AIDS. Townes also attacks what she calls the cultural production of evil—the often hostile nature of white society toward whatever is not like itself, particularly black persons. Describing how U.S. society mistreats black bodies, Townes pushes her readers to see African American bodies as ailing and to address the roots of this problem in the fantastic hegemonic imagination. This natural result of the destructive forces of slavery, segregation, and racism calls for the dismantling of evil in U.S. society and churches.

The final chapter gestures toward a transformation of our Christian understanding of bodies and the image of God based on these insights. Since I am not a womanist theologian, it would be inappropriate for me to propose a "womanist" theology of the body. Nevertheless, I aim to show how womanist theologians' approaches may begin to reshape Christian theology of the body. Demonstrating how these thinkers make clear to European American theologians that we cannot ignore the issue of racism, I suggest an outline of a transformed theology of the body, proposing a shift in Christian attitudes toward a positive view of bodies in both similarities and differences. The goal is to begin to develop a Christian anthropology that functions actively to empower all Christians, but especially white Christians, to resist the sin of racism.

By raising the question of bodies and the image of God, this book tackles the issue of how European American Christians should understand our past, present, and future role in the problem of racism. Of necessity, the reader is invited on several different tours through history: chapters 2 and 3 read U.S. social and theological history in European American perspective; chapters 4 through 8 reread this history through the lens of womanist theologies. This makes it possible, in chapter 9, to evaluate the light womanist thinkers shine on the task of today's European American Christians. Attending to the voices of black women, who have been and continue to be severely oppressed by multiple burdens, urges us toward respecting all bodies as made in the image of God. While black theologians have been wrestling with the problem of racism for decades, few white scholars have done so. Facing up to this issue honestly is vital to European American Christians' integrity, both as Americans invested in equality and as Christians proclaiming human dignity.

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Racism as a White Problem

Slavery and segregation are now illegal in the United States, but their effects are still deeply and pervasively felt. Studies consistently show that European Americans enjoy unearned and often unsought advantages in every arena, from education to employment to home mortgage rates. Racism, however, is usually explained by describing its destructive consequences for people of color, especially African Americans. Understanding how the ongoing trajectory of slavery, segregation, and white racist supremacy has shaped the black community is vital to African Americans' insight into themselves, their histories, and their visions for the future. The psychological and emotional toll for people of color who constantly confront blatant and subtle racism is unimaginable to most whites, yet such knowledge can motivate us to join the struggle to change this dysfunctional system. Unless we cultivate eyes to see it, however, we will continue to perpetuate it.

Clearly, racism's history includes all groups in the United States, not only people of European and African descent, but also Native Americans, Asians, Latino/as, Middle Easterners, and others. A much larger study is needed to develop this broader and still-unfolding history. In keeping with the limitations of this volume, this chapter traces one piece of this puzzle, exploring the development of racism against African Americans as a process that originally unfolded within white minds. I attempt to describe the mental gymnastics in which European Americans have engaged as we have assigned peculiar meanings to African bodies. In order to claim this as our own history, I speak—and encourage white readers to think—in the first person plural. My goal is to prompt European Americans, especially Christians, to take an honest look at this history and begin to understand the responsibility it confers upon us. While all European

10.1057/9780230114715 - Racism and the Image of God, Karen Teel

Americans bear the weight of this terrible legacy, white Christians who believe that every human being is made in the image of God and has inherent and inviolable dignity have an especially pressing need—not only social, but also theological—to answer to it.

The task of untangling the tortuous logic by which European Americans came to see people of African descent as inferior is daunting. No scholar has yet written a comprehensive history of this social construction of the meaning of black bodies from black perspectives. And although some thinkers are discussing the history of racism from white points of view, few have attended to the fact that virtually all those who have contributed to the creation and perpetuation of systemic racism in the United States have been Christians. How is this possible? What was going on, and what goes on today, inside the heads of white Christians who were and are the driving force behind this tragedy of human existence?

What I can do here is limited, and the ambiguities of my own identity as a European American woman necessarily color my view. Nevertheless, this chapter briefly chronicles the past five hundred years of negative white Christian attitudes toward African bodies in what is now the United States. I describe our view of African bodies as objects in the Atlantic and domestic slave trades, as animals in slavery as it existed from day to day on plantations and in other settings, and as hypersexualized in society from emancipation to the formal civil rights movement. These attitudes are summarized in a fourth section that briefly outlines contemporary media representations of African Americans. The concluding section argues that understanding this process and claiming responsibility for it is vital to the work of reversing it. We must face the fact that as a rule, the people who brought Africans to the New World to exploit them for their labor, enacted segregation laws, and continue to perpetuate racist stereotypes are European American Christians.

The Rise of the Atlantic Slave Trade: Black Bodies as "Objects"

Christianity teaches that human beings are never to be treated as objects or as means to something else, but always as ends in themselves. Yet the slave trade that people of European descent—most of them Christians—developed in order to build the "New World" denied this tradition. This is not altogether surprising, as the insistence, even in Christian theology, that every person is *equally* human is a quite recent idea. Perhaps ironically, the longstanding failure of Christianity to prevent its adherents from treating some people as objects has helped to fuel the development of this understanding. But if we hope to overcome pernicious and persistent stereotypes that do not vanish simply because an idea matures, we need to understand exactly how they were formed. In the case of the Atlantic and domestic slave trade, how did Christians of European descent come to see Africans as objects rather than as human beings?

The concept of race as we know it today in the United States did not exist before the colonies. Europeans had long tended to see people in groups other than our own as inferior to ourselves, but the idea that these groups would be divided along color lines was a product of the U.S. system of slavery. Slave traders and owners invented race to justify slavery. As this system became more and more finely tuned, racial distinctions grew sharper and their ramifications more dire until Europeans finally refused to see Africans as human at all. Yet the categories of "white" and "black" are not absolute or empirical but a social reality that developed over centuries. As early European colonists, we identified with our home countries; once the United States was established, immigrant groups were known for generations as "Irish," "Italian," "Jewish," and so on—a practice still sometimes carried on today. The racial category "white" did not include everyone of European descent until the twentieth century, and it emerged at least in part in contrast to the racial identification of people of African descent as "black."[1]

With the possible exception of South Carolina, building the New World on black slaves was not something Europeans planned to do initially.[2] It happened gradually, as other sources of labor vanished. European Americans today often ignore the fact that our ancestors colonized the Americas by engaging in a genocide of the so-called "uncivilized" Native peoples. Having driven out or killed most of the occupants, Europeans needed to import vast amounts of cheap labor in order to exploit the riches of the lands we were conquering. So, the first Africans to arrive in the territory that became the United States were brought across the Atlantic to work as indentured servants. The first ship known to have landed in the colonies carrying Africans for this purpose arrived in Jamestown in 1619, a year before the *Mayflower*. But Africans were present in various parts of the New World much earlier: they were on the island of Hispaniola (now Haiti) by 1501, and the Atlantic slave trade began in earnest in 1518, when the first cargo of African slaves arrived in the West Indies, a century before the Dutch ship landed at Jamestown.[3]

At first, the European colonists relied on Native peoples of the Americas and European indentured servants as well as African slaves to provide labor throughout the New World. But the Native populations were decimated by exposure to European diseases and by the brutal labor that we demanded—first mining, then clearing jungles for cultivation. In the nineteenth century, Bartolomé de Las Casas, a Catholic missionary to the Native American peoples, campaigned out of compassion for the importation of Africans to take the Natives' place, because the Native people's suffering was so extreme that they were dying in huge numbers. Like many Europeans, Las Casas saw Africans, who were resistant to some European diseases, as "hardier" than Native peoples, and he perceived Africans as capable of more strenuous physical labor than Native peoples.[4]

Though Europeans did not begin importing Africans with the intention of building the New World solely on their labor, neither did we think slavery itself was inherently evil. Even Las Casas, a Christian missionary, did not argue that no human beings should be enslaved, but that it was more humane to enslave Africans than Native Americans. This sort of claim has deep Christian roots: it parallels the apostle Paul's polite request, in the biblical letter to Philemon, that Philemon consider freeing his slave Onesimus because Onesimus had become a Christian and was precious to Paul.[5] Throughout the centuries, Christians have often struggled with the enslavement of particular people who were dear to us, but we have rarely questioned the morality of slavery itself. Wide-scale horror and disgust at slavery as an institution emerged only with the extreme abuses endemic to the Atlantic trade and New World slavery.

American slavery depended on the Atlantic slave trade, named for the ocean across which Africans were imported. The trade was a vast, finely orchestrated European enterprise in which the English, Dutch, French, Spanish, and Portuguese all participated eagerly. We hoped to wrest untold economic wealth from the whole of the New World, including North, Central, and South America. The British territory that became the United States imported only four percent of the Africans who were brought across the Atlantic; the vast majority were taken to the Caribbean and to Central and South America, most notably Cuba and Brazil.[6] The journey from Africa became known as the Middle Passage, because it was the second leg of the triangular journey of merchants who would sail from England or Europe with cargoes of rum, guns, and ammunition; trade them for slaves on the western coast of Africa and sail with these "black cargoes" to the New World; sell the slaves and acquire mineral wealth, sugar, textiles, or rum to sell in England/Europe, where usually a profit would be logged and the cycle would begin again.

The European merchants or "slavers" considered our African passengers to be cargo, like any other merchandise, and treated them accordingly. We saw these "black cargoes" not as human beings but as so many objects representing potential profit. Slavers sought a balance between packing in as many slaves as possible and maintaining conditions adequate to keep them alive and healthy enough to be sold on arrival. Slaves required feeding and exercise, but were afforded no comforts and considered expendable in extreme circumstances. For example, once the slave trade was outlawed, it was not unheard of for an entire "cargo" to be thrown hastily overboard if another ship approached with the intent of enforcing the law. By the time slavery was abolished in 1888 in Brazil, the last country in the New World to do so, we had imported at least fifteen million people from Africa to the New World and an additional thirty to forty million had died as a result of the trade—in African wars or slave-catching expeditions or during the Middle Passage.[7]

How could we see African people as cargoes, as objects, rather than as fellow human beings? Europeans have long tended to see difference as signaling inferiority, and Africans certainly appeared quite different from Europeans. Observing Africans' relatively scanty dress, for example, we imagined Africans had abnormal sexual desires rather than attributing the custom to differences in climate; we also made naïve connections between Africans and apes or chimpanzees, whose existence we learned of at about the same time. Using these inaccurate assumptions—which survive today in equally inaccurate stereotypes—we thought of Africans as closer in nature to nonhuman animals than to ourselves. With this defective reasoning, we deemed Africans suitable to be subjected to other, "superior" people and concluded that it was morally acceptable to exploit them for profit.

Even with such twisted and self-serving arguments, Europeans never sailed to Africa with large armies but rather with a few small ships at a time. How could so few Europeans have coerced so many Africans into slavery? Contrary to popular perception, European slave traders did not roam the African jungles, capturing people at will.[8] This technique for acquiring slaves, known as "man-stealing," was frowned upon by Africans and Europeans alike. It was rarely employed. Instead, in the "civilized" fashion of merchants, the European traders made contact with African rulers or slave dealers, who rounded up people of conquered tribes—or criminals or debtors within their own tribes—and sold them as slaves to the traders. In Africa, as in many parts of the world, slavery had a long history.[9] Most often African rulers and dealers traded people for rum, guns, and ammunition in order to augment their own power. The slave trade was a mainstay of African economies and of African rulers' ability to maintain power in their local areas. Like the European traders, these African rulers treated enslaved people as objects to be used for profit rather than as human beings. Europeans preyed upon this existing system to our own advantage. Both the Atlantic slavers and the African rulers who supplied their cargoes exhibit the tendency of groups to see "outsiders" as inferior to ourselves.

It may seem that the Africans should have banded together to fight the Atlantic slave trade. But just as Europeans competed against one another to extract wealth from the New World, members of the various African groups, who had different customs and spoke different languages, felt no natural bond because they were all "African." People thought on the level of tribes and nations, not of races and continents, and because of this, they did not—indeed could not—perceive the trade as the wholesale danger to "Africa" or "Africans" that many now consider it to have been. The idea that people would unite across such boundaries along lines of skin color, or "race" as we understand it today, was not a cause of the Atlantic slave trade, but instead appears to be an outcome of that trade, particularly in the United States.[10]

Once the Atlantic trade established slavery in the colonies, a thriving domestic slave market sprang up. Participants included Atlantic traders offering slaves newly imported from Africa as well as colonial and U.S. traders, plantation owners, and less affluent masters. In the colonies, "anyone who could own slaves did."[11] The sale of slaves made up an enormous portion of the New World economies, particularly in what became the United States.

The slave markets were universally inhumane.[12] Ironically, while the buying and selling of slaves treated black bodies as commodities or objects, the traders marketed what we might now think of as the "whole person"—personality as well as physical health and strength. We put slaves on auction blocks and often stripped them naked so potential buyers could examine them. As buyers, we talked to slaves to try to get a sense of their characters. We also inferred personality

10.1057/9780230114715 - Racism and the Image of God, Karen Teel

traits from physical characteristics: scars from whippings indicated a tendency to disobedience; lighter skin color came to be associated with greater intelligence. We wanted intelligent yet compliant slaves with the strength to work; as well, we wanted female slaves to bear children to increase our wealth. We believed that Africans were inferior, incapable of directing their own lives, and that we could be good masters to these people.[13] Yet we also sought out slaves who would be intelligent, strong, and capable with children, especially as house servants. So while the act of purchasing another human being reduced that person to the level of object, as buyers of slaves we also believed we were purchasing human characteristics. Truly, those of us who shopped for slaves were masters of self-deception.[14]

The lie not only warped our minds as purchasers but also sometimes crept into the psyche of the purchased, who navigated this corrupt system as best they could. From the slaves' perspectives, some masters were better than others, perhaps because we were kinder or owned their family members. Some slaves succeeded in manipulating their sales to their own advantage. Imagine the contradiction of using one's mind, consciously exercising one's human intelligence, to influence the sale of one's own body as if one were an animal. Linda Brent, who never accepted her master's definition of her as a slave, could or would not face it. When Brent's friend and employer offered to purchase her freedom, she "wrote to Mrs. Bruce, thanking her, but saying that being sold from one owner to another seemed too much like slavery; that such a great obligation could not easily be cancelled; and that I preferred to go to my brother in California."[15] Given the indignity of being sold like a piece of property, even to a friend whose intention was to emancipate her, Brent preferred to escape the system rather than to be released from it legally. Mrs. Bruce proceeded with the purchase, telling Brent that she "did not buy you for your services," but would have done it even if Brent had gone to California, simply for "the satisfaction of knowing that you left me a free woman."[16] Yet Brent felt obligated to remain in Mrs. Bruce's employ. Even as Brent resisted the idea of being bought, she felt bound by the sale, as if she owed a moral debt to the purchaser who intended her freedom.

As masters, we also realized this fundamental tension of slavery: that the mind can remain free even as the body is tortured. Arguing that abolitionism and emancipation were insufficient conditions for black people's well-being, Shawn Copeland reminds us, "By depriving slaves of literacy, slaveholders sought to curtail freedom's most basic domain—the mind."[17] Many slaveholders assumed that the literate slave was more likely to seek freedom and was better able to seize the opportunity when it came. Even when we sought to control slaves' thoughts, slaves could maintain a certain degree of privacy in their minds, and we became uneasy when we could not tell what slaves were thinking. Again, notice the irony of the master who thought his intellect was superior, yet relied upon—and felt threatened by—the intelligence of his slaves. Still, we retained control over the slaves' bodies. Christianity has long taught that the body and mind are aspects of the person that can be distinguished theoretically but never in practice: the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. As Christian slave traders, we denied this even as we profited from it, treating black bodies and minds as objects to be bought and sold while remaining willfully oblivious to the humanity of the people we traded.

Institutionalizing Slavery: Black Bodies as "Animals"

Only gradually did the slave trade, treating African people as objects and a means to profit rather than as human beings with dignity, come to provide the only source of cheap labor for the New World. Various complex factors influenced the development of New World slavery as a condition to be borne exclusively by people of African descent. Although slavery was always based on disregard for the humanity of the bodies of people perceived to be inferior, it took centuries for slavery to become racialized, based on distinctions of skin color. This ominous development, new in human history, was a contribution of our slave system. Under slavery, Europeans treated Africans not like fellow human beings but like animals. In order to justify this, people of European descent denied categorically that Africans shared fully in the rational nature that European Christians had long taken as a marker of humanity, of the image of God. Disregarding Jesus's caution that we cannot serve both God and wealth,[18] we defined Africans as subhuman in order to maximize our profits.

Along with European indentured servants and the Native peoples of the Americas, we exploited Africans to provide the labor force for building the colonies that would later become the United States. Gradually, we phased Native peoples out of the workforce as their numbers shrank and we adopted a policy of separation that eventually led to the reservation system still operating today. By 1705, we had abandoned indentured servitude and adopted outright slavery as a more efficient means of maintaining the workforce. The number of black people in the colonies increased rapidly due to the continuing Atlantic trade and to a rate of reproduction that was unusually high.[19] People of African descent now bore alone the burden of enslavement to us.

Europeans believed we needed slaves as cheap labor in order to exploit the riches of the Americas. Once the extraction of mineral wealth from the mines began to slow, sugar, tobacco, coffee, and chocolate were the primary cash crops we forced slaves to tend, followed by cotton in the United States. Cultivating these crops was the main incentive for bringing so many workers across the ocean. Countless human beings were coerced into brutal slavery and died so that we could enjoy the luxury of adding sugar to our tea.[20]

As noted, the buying and selling of human beings in the Atlantic and domestic slave trade markets presents a difficult and complex phenomenon. Only bodies could be bought or sold, yet even the mind could be colonized. One of the greatest tragedies of American slavery was the psychological harm it wreaked on enslaved people, many of whom internalized our hatred and disdain, to varying degrees. In an example of this harm in day-to-day practices of enslavement, Frederick Douglass, born into slavery but later freed, describes a transformation that took place in himself upon being treated cruelly by a new master. In one of the narrative versions of his life during enslavement, Douglass writes, "Mr. Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in body, soul, and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed, my intellect languished, the disposition to read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute!"[21] Through torture, Covey was able to "break" Douglass, realizing—at least temporarily—the fiction that Douglass was an animal, less than human, even though Douglass understood what was happening.

European Americans eventually defined slavery as a permanent condition. For most of their history, enslaved Africans had no real hope of freedom. A few escaped or were emancipated, but most died in bondage. While slavery was terrible for all who experienced it, we Europeans exploited men and women differently. Chapter 4 discusses Katie Cannon's insight that while we used men primarily for their labor, we exploited women for their physical labor in the fields and in the houses, their reproductive capabilities by forcing them to bear children to reproduce the slave force, their sexuality by rendering them "answerable with their bodies" to the desires of European

American men, and their nurturing capacities to nurse our children while neglecting their own and to do the domestic chores of our households.[22] Thus, while black men's oppression under slavery usually had only one dimension, black women's was fourfold. All these aspects of oppression were lived out in black people's bodies as we treated them like animals.

Further, slavery in the United States came to be based solely on race, defined as ancestry manifested in skin color. Anyone who was black or who was deemed to have so-called black blood, even if one parent or multiple grandparents were of European descent, was automatically enslaved. To ensure the continuation of the slave population, we codified into law the idea that all children of African women would be slaves, regardless of paternity. For example, in 1662, Virginia enacted its law of *partus sequitur ventrem*, mandating that children of female slaves followed their mothers into slavery. Merely by virtue of skin color—or the mother's skin color—we deemed some people inferior, "naturally suited" to slavery. This was based on no measure of merit; we utilized no process for assessing intelligence, emotional capacities, physical abilities, or spiritual capabilities. We simply decided that people with darker skin were inferior.

Some Europeans even argued that slavery was beneficial not only to ourselves but also to Africans. We believed Africans were "heathens" incapable of governing themselves; they needed masters who would "civilize"—and Christianize—them. Sometimes, we forced baptism on slaves "for their own good," arguing that black people were supposedly better off in the American colonies with their bodies enslaved but their souls "free" than in Africa on their way to damnation. In this way, we pressed Christianity itself into service to justify slavery.[23]

Even when Africans became Christians, we did not consider them equal with ourselves. Historian Albert Raboteau reports, "A continual complaint of masters was that Christianity would ruin their slaves by making them 'saucy,' since they would begin to think themselves equal to white folks."[24] Some accounts written by slaves describe the peculiar version of Christianity that we preached to them. We selected as our texts Bible passages that emphasized submissiveness and unquestioning obedience of slaves to their masters.

Not all Africans were eager to become Christians. Some preferred the religious practices of their homelands, and in any case, Christianity was the religion espoused by their oppressors, who often were not exactly models of Christian charity. In what can only be an enormous understatement, Raboteau notes that “the slaves themselves were not insensitive to the hypocrisy of the masters.”[25] Rejecting our version of Christianity, the slaves developed their own tradition of biblical interpretation. Like us, they chose some passages and rejected others. They ignored the passages we used to justify their condition and to encourage them to accept it passively, and they embraced passages that they found liberating. For example, Howard Thurman remembers that his grandmother, who read the Gospels regularly, refused to read Paul because when she was enslaved, the master always preached on Paul’s message urging slaves to obey their masters. So she promised God that if she were freed, she would never read that passage again.[26] Raboteau concludes, “The slaves did not simply become Christians; they creatively fashioned a Christian tradition to fit their own peculiar experience of enslavement in America.”[27] The circumstances of this country’s origins guaranteed that black and white people would read the Bible differently.

Though using the Bible to justify slavery, Europeans became uneasy at the thought of enslaving fellow Christians. For example, some denominations considered whether it was permissible to separate married black Christian slave couples; if not, our ability to buy and sell slaves could be restricted. Black couples were regularly separated, and the partners would sometimes take a second spouse upon being sold away from the first; a new master might even require this. Churches struggled over what to do about these “adulterous” unions.[28] To avoid such dilemmas, some European Christians, particularly English planters who believed that baptism made it necessary to free the baptized person, refused to baptize enslaved Africans. Colonial assemblies acted to protect the economic interests of the slave owners: “By 1706 at least six colonial legislatures had passed acts denying that baptism altered the condition of a slave ‘as to his bondage or freedome.’ ”[29] Some slave owners tried to mitigate the tendency of Christian faith to encourage the slaves to seek freedom by preventing slaves from praying without oversight from European American preachers, which only drove slaves to worship in secret.[30] And some of us resorted to more extreme arguments to justify slavery, most notably the idea that Africans were subhuman: “Masters…objected to slave conversion because they believed that Africans were too ‘brutish’ to be instructed” in Christian beliefs.[31]

A terrible progression reveals itself in the complex debates over slavery. According to historian George Fredrickson, at first most Europeans recognized Africans as human, though we often described them as inferior. The American Colonization Society, founded in 1817, believed that blacks and whites could not live together in society and advocated relocating free black people to Africa (Liberia).[32] Colonizationists argued that if "Negroes" were "degraded," this was due to environmental issues: being enslaved naturally reduced them to a lower level of human functioning, an effect that was not present in free black people. This deficiency—if it existed—was said to be our own fault for enslaving blacks, and white prejudice against blacks was acknowledged to be a result of slavery, yet this prejudice was said to be too deeply entrenched in U.S. society to be eliminated by emancipation.[33] Black and white people could never live together as equals. Therefore, colonizationists advocated separation of the races; they did not always emphasize ending slavery, though most favored doing so.[34] In contrast, abolitionists condemned slavery as inherently sinful, both on the part of those who enslaved people and insofar as this unhealthy environment supposedly elicited sinful or degraded behavior among the enslaved. Arguing that we ought to be able to overcome the sin of prejudice, abolitionists denounced the colonizationists' separatist solution as un-Christian.[35]

By the 1830s, realizing that enslaving fellow Christians was contradictory, and impelled by egalitarian abolitionist arguments to formulate a consistent position, proslavery advocates began to argue that slavery was "a positive good."[36] Debates raged over the nature of U.S. slavery. Was slavery necessary to this supposedly class-free society because it made equality possible among whites—for example, planters and sharecroppers—or because "Negroes" were naturally "fitted" for slavery, or both? Some of us argued that black people were suited to slavery, using the notion that Africa was less civilized and that Africans were biologically inferior, emphasizing cranial and facial features, and appealing to white fear of miscegenation.[37] If suited to slavery, then were black people like beasts or like children?[38] Ironically, at least one missionary, Morgan Godwin, invoked the clearly human bodies of black persons to defend their equality as fully human beings, while Cotton Mather used the slaves' rational powers to make the same argument.[39] But the argument defining Africans as subhuman, naturally rather than environmentally inferior, won out. In 1833, Richard H. Colfax published a proslavery pamphlet setting out the basic argument for the "natural" inferiority of black people that would persist for the next century.[40] The view of black people as beasts triumphed. Even when ex-slaves published eloquent and heartbreaking narratives showing that Africans were intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually equal to Europeans and making sophisticated appeals to Christian and human decency, we stubbornly retained this attitude, which later morphed into prosegregation and white supremacist stances.[41] And over time, we came to assume that the supposed inferiority of black people was symbolized and represented by skin color.

Slavery was not a new idea in human history. It had long been customary for conquering armies to enslave the conquered or for criminals to be sold as slaves. However, these were often temporary arrangements that did not involve lifelong bondage for the captives or the enslavement of their wives and children. What was new about our version of slavery was that we based it on the alleged natural and permanent inferiority, the designation to animal status, of the enslaved people.[42] According to the laws ultimately enacted, slavery bound every member of the enslaved "race," it was lifelong with no possibility of emancipation, and it was hereditary. This last became especially important when the importation of new slaves from Africa (though not the domestic buying and selling of slaves) was federally outlawed in 1808.[43]

These laws were made over time and varied from state to state, but eventually they became our national standard. The U.S. Constitution of 1787 contained the "Three-Fifths Compromise," declaring that a slave or indentured servant would count as three-fifths of a person for the purpose of determining the number of elected representatives each state would have. While slaveholding was the law of the United States, the industries of the north did not depend as heavily on slave labor; those states were much quicker to outlaw slavery than the southern states, whose cotton and tobacco empires were literally built on the backs of the enslaved Africans. Christians of European descent may have thought of ourselves as building a new country based on freedom and equality, but we were brutally coercing our fellow human beings to build this new nation, as though they were animals.

From Emancipation to Civil Rights: Black Bodies as "Hypersexualized"

While northern states had generally outlawed slavery decades before, the South was forced to emancipate its slaves upon the conclusion of the Civil War in 1865. An estimated four million slaves were alive to be freed.[44] At last, we could no longer own black people. But after centuries of legalized slavery, emancipation alone could not persuade most of us that black people were our equals. This generalized disdain and fear eventually culminated in various laws we enacted to restrict the freedom of African Americans. Our disregard for people with darker skin persisted as inaccurate stereotypes were perpetuated, including severe misperceptions about African American sexuality. European Americans exploited the traditional Christian ambiguity toward bodies and sexuality to demean African Americans and maintain their second-class status. Not until the formal civil rights movement were African Americans able to organize in numbers large enough to call our collective attention to the brutality of our laws, attitudes, and actions.

The years from the end of the Civil War to 1877 are known as Reconstruction. As a nation in tatters endeavored to rebuild, various attempts were made to enable freed people to establish new lives. Some hoped that African Americans could achieve equality as full members of society. Two major institutions provided assistance: the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, or Freedmen's Bureau, and the black churches. The Freedmen's Bureau, a network of offices in the Southern states, supervised employment, health care, and educational initiatives for black and white people in the wake of the war. The independent black churches, exploding in numbers and membership, provided central meeting places for black communities and offered opportunities for many black people to gain leadership experience as ministers, which they used to advance black people's welfare in the political realm. For a time, black people attained public office, including national congressional seats, and they campaigned vigorously for full civil rights for black Americans.[45] Despite these efforts, most whites did not support the Reconstruction quest for equal civil rights, and it ultimately failed. Not until the formal civil rights movement would African Americans obtain a measure of equality under the law.

From a contemporary perspective, we might think that the freed slaves should have received some form of compensation, since their lives, labor, and bodies had been the foundation of wealth-building in the U.S. economy since its inception. However, we made no concerted national effort to transfer resources to them. The individualistic Protestant work ethic that had influenced the founding of the United States came to the fore as those of us in power insisted that people of African descent would have to make it on their own, just as we supposedly had. We ignored the shameful fact that our own economic success had come at the expense of the Africans' lives and dignity. In fact, some argued that the real injury inflicted with the end of slavery was to the colonists who had now lost their main source of income and wealth; therefore, the former plantation owners deserved compensation, not the former slaves. We did not formally act upon this argument, a fact historian David Brion Davis hails as "revolutionary," given that most slave emancipations in the Western Hemisphere did involve such compensation.[46] But neither did we allocate any resources to African Americans, who for centuries had been the backbone of our developing economy.

Yet we could not leave African Americans to their own devices. Fearing them, worrying that they would take our jobs or refuse to work altogether, many Southern states passed laws known as black codes. Like the antebellum slave codes, the black codes sought to regulate many aspects of black people's lives by delineating the terms under which they could own property, requiring them to work, establishing curfews, and preventing them from gaining various benefits of citizenship, such as voting rights.[47] Many of us thought African Americans should work only as sharecroppers. Under this arrangement, black families grew the crops of landowners; in return, they got a place to live and minimal supplies. Anything else they needed, such as medical attention, was counted against their share of profits from the crops. Only if there were significant profit at the end of the year might the landowner allocate a portion to the sharecropper. Even then, we often failed to follow through, and as the laws favored us, black people had no recourse. Thus, although black people were nominally freed after slavery, many were still tied to a master with no real opportunity to strike out on their own. Practically speaking, this was not much of an improvement over slavery. In fact, racial hostility was worse after emancipation than it had been before.[48] It seems we feared—perhaps logically, given the cruelties of slavery—that, given social and political power, the freed people would turn violently against us. But these fears turned out to be groundless, as ex-slaves proved more interested in locating lost family members and seeking employment than in retaliating against former owners.[49]

Due to the indifference and growing hostility of the Europeans in power, Reconstruction was a difficult and complex period for African Americans. On the one hand, they entered freedom owning their own bodies and labor for the first time in their lives. Clearly, this was an improvement. On the other hand, ownership of their bodies and labor was all they had. Families had been scattered, many had died in the war, and those who remained had no money, land, or—in many cases—marketable skills with which to build a new life. During this early period of freedom, most simply struggled to survive. Immediately after emancipation, then, our attitudes toward African Americans did not change a great deal, except perhaps to grow worse.

Upon Reconstruction's end, the U.S. government terminated its scattered efforts to help black people transition from slavery to freedom. With the closing of the Freedmen's Bureau, black churches became the only institutional organizations to which black people could turn for support. At best, European Americans in power ignored the struggles of formerly enslaved people; at worst, we worked to thwart them. The failure to establish civil rights for black people was enshrined in the Supreme Court's sanctioning of a "separate but equal" doctrine of racial segregation in the 1896 decision *Plessy v. Ferguson.*

White supremacy was on the rise.[50] The Ku Klux Klan, along with other formal and informal networks of resistance to black well-being, took shape. Klan members and all who participated in lynchings epitomized the new manifestation of ultimate disregard for black bodies. We carried out lynchings with relative impunity until 1965, motivated primarily by fear of the supposed hypersexuality of African Americans. Ever since we had first encountered Africans in apparently immodest attire, this myth had been perpetuated, and since, as slave owners, we used slaves for breeding, the stereotype only grew stronger with time. Many lynchings followed accusations of rape, most of which went unproven but were avenged abruptly.

White Christians' complicity in the brutal history of lynching is undeniable. Klan members were Christians, singing hymns at meetings and burning crosses as warnings to black people. Lynchings were often carried out by a few people who left the bodies for passersby to see. But in cases when a trial was held, entire towns would turn out for the execution of a "convicted" black criminal as though it were entertainment. Some commemorated these events with picture postcards. Perhaps we might say that Klan members were not truly Christian. But the crowds of white people who turned out to witness lynchings, sometimes after church on Sunday, were ordinary Christians who failed to notice the profound similarity, captured in Billie Holiday's song "Strange Fruit," between Jesus's body and lynched bodies.[51] Like the traders and masters, we continued to view black people as inferior, considering them expendable. We regarded a black person's violent death not as a gruesome tragedy but as an amusing spectacle.[52]

10.1057/9780230114715 - Racism and the Image of God, Karen Teel

In search of a better life, many black Americans, who at first were largely concentrated in the southern United States, migrated to the north, especially following World Wars I and II. Segregation was the law of the land, and racism was as virulent in the north as in the south. Although often more employment opportunities were available in northern cities, most European American employers would offer only menial, low-paying work to black applicants. Black women had a particularly difficult time, as the only work for which we would hire them was domestic; other forms of employment such as factory work, sometimes open to black men, were generally closed to black women. And often, as owners of apartment buildings, we refused to rent to black women and their children, considering single black men more likely to find employment and keep up with rent payments.[53]

During the Second World War, black American soldiers fought valiantly and experienced social acceptance and appreciation in Europe, while black women entered factories and took other jobs opened up by the exodus of men to fight the war. Although European Americans tried to discredit this evidence of black people's capabilities, these experiences fueled black people's determination to no longer tolerate unjust segregation laws.[54] Both whites and blacks knew that separation based on skin color did not lead to equality, whether in the armed services, public facilities, schools, churches, or businesses; however, as privileged European Americans we had the luxury of being able to fool ourselves into thinking it did. We were finally forced to confront this fantasy by the emerging civil rights movement.

Although black people had long been working for their civil rights, white people commonly hold the movement, which hastened the overturning of the Jim Crow laws, to have begun on December 1, 1955. On this day Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama, city bus to a white person. Leaders willing and unwilling, such as Martin Luther King, Jr., began organizing boycotts, sit-ins, protests, and demonstrations that continued through the 1960s. The two main strands of protest were the nonviolent approach, championed by King, and the Black Power movement, known for its slogan "by any means necessary" and for Malcolm X's vision.

Some European Americans, especially those of us who appreciated the affinities among the civil rights, antiwar, and women's movements, participated in the civil rights movement along with black people. But many of us resisted the push for equal rights, still consciously or unconsciously thinking of black people as hypersexualized, as animals, or even as objects, inferior to ourselves. This attitude revealed itself variously: by state governors who, defying federal orders, tried to block black students from enrolling in public high schools and universities; by white police officers who set dogs and fire hoses on black demonstrators, including children; and by often anonymous domestic terrorists who bombed black places of worship, the most infamous of which, in Birmingham, resulted in the deaths of four young black girls. Nevertheless, the movement overturned the Jim Crow laws by the end of the 1960s.

European Americans often consider the end of the civil rights movement to be symbolized by the Voting Rights Act of 1965 or the death of Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1968. However, equality under the law did not lead smoothly to social and political equality. Altering laws does not automatically change the way people think of one another; the attitudes of distrust and ignorance in which the Jim Crow laws were rooted are extremely difficult to change, even for Christians. Though it is now illegal to discriminate based on race, racism continues both in individual acts and attitudes and in documented systemic inequalities. Resisting these problems requires more subtle labors, both practical and theoretical.

Current Media Stereotypes: Black Bodies as "Hypersexualized Animal Objects"

To this day, many European Americans, including Christians, remain profoundly disrespectful of the humanity of people of color. Yet many of us fail to realize this because our disrespect manifests in ways we do not recognize as problematic, such as our belief in stereotypes that we have been socialized to think are real—for example, that African Americans are lazy, violent, or have high sex drives. One particularly pernicious perpetuator of these ideas is the media. Drawing on social theorist Patricia Hill Collins's book *Black Sexual Politics*, which traces many connections between current and past stereotypes and representations of bodies of African descent, this section mentions some of these ideas, which originated in white minds during slavery.[55] I intend this brief description to encourage European Americans to sharpen our critical eye regarding what we currently accept in the name of "entertainment."

Aiming to illuminate some of the difficulties African Americans face in discussing and defining what "gender" means to them, Collins describes the complex interaction of old stereotypes that, in movies, music, and television, are continually updated for contemporary audiences and minds. With specific music videos, television shows, and movies, she shows how even positive media portrayals of African Americans almost always make sense only in light of old stereotypes. For example, in terms of sexuality, Collins describes Jeff Pollack's 1997 movie *Booty Call* as a film that relies on the historical assumption that black men and women are always looking for sex; indeed, she questions whether the movie would "work" if it were made with white actors.[56] Yet the characters are portrayed as determined to engage in sexual behavior responsibly: the women demand safe sex, prompting the men to embark on a hilarious midnight search for condoms. In this way, *Booty Call* builds on a traditionally negative stereotype even while some of the characters' actions contest it.

While African Americans are portrayed as hypersexualized, the "animal" representation also remains prevalent, though often subtle, in popular media. For example, Collins points out that a term like "bitch" is "reminiscent of the association of Africans with animals" and can denote both crankiness and fertility.[57] More broadly, consider a film like James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009), which Cameron intended as a thought-provoking, anti-imperialist, pro-environmentalist critique. While the plot is fairly complex, the end result is that a human intervenes to save an entire race of aliens, the Na'vi, from a human corporate/military takeover aimed at exploiting the mineral resources of the moon on which they live. With its action-packed story line and technologically innovative 3-D effects, *Avatar* was well-reviewed and quickly became one of the highest-grossing movies ever made. It also garnered critical attention for its use of almost exclusively white actors for the human characters and almost exclusively actors of color for the humanoid, catlike Na'vi characters.[58] Of the four principal actors cast as the Na'vi, intended to represent a primitive tribal culture, three are black and one is Native American.

While negative stereotypes are sometimes co-opted by their intended victims—so that, for example, black women and men can seize upon a term like "freak" or "bitch" and make it signify a sexually accomplished, good, and/or strong black woman[59]—the fact that this creative reappropriation needs to take place at all shows the extent to which such stereotypes still function in U.S. society. Could our movies, music, and television be different? Or will we, for the sake of entertainment, perpetuate these objectifying representations? Author and social activist bell hooks suggests that if consumers of these products wanted to see more thoughtful portrayals of loving relationships, of people doing their best to live decent lives—portrayals from which we might learn something useful to our own attempts at success and happiness—we would demand them from the media moguls.[60] But it seems Christians and non-Christians alike often prefer to be entertained by stereotypes, violence, and destruction, whether because we think such images are more realistic or because we value them as an escape from reality. Whatever the reason, it is clear that media portrayals of African Americans frequently capitalize on old stereotypes. Even though they may be updated for modern sensibilities, the staying power of these myths signals the work we still have to do.

Claiming Our Own Reality

In considering the history of European American attitudes toward African bodies, a basic paradox immediately becomes apparent. We have denied African people's humanity, choosing to believe that they lack authentic subjectivity and moral agency in comparison with ourselves and deeming them to be more like animals than humans, thus justifying treating them inhumanely. Yet at the same time, especially during slavery, we have relied on Africans for their human subjectivity and agency as thinking beings able to accomplish complex tasks that beasts could not. This paradox is mirrored in our view of African bodies as *hypersexualized*, even as we relied on their reproductive and nurturing capabilities; as *animals* who lacked souls or human feeling, even as we depended on their ability to think and solve problems; and as *objects* and *sources of economic wealth*, even as we counted on them to be our friends and helpers.[61]

These contradictory attitudes have stemmed from a reductionist and hierarchical view of humanity. We have assumed that some people are naturally more "depraved" than others, labeling African people as hypersexualized; that some people manifest the image of God less well than others, labeling African people as animals; and, consequently, that some people are worth less than others, labeling African people as objects.[62] Ultimately, we have willfully dehumanized Africans, denied that they possess the image of God, and declared that African bodies have less inherent value than European bodies. We have done all this even as we rely on certain aspects of African people's humanity for our own personal, sexual, political, and economic gain. These actions have destroyed any moral authority people of European descent might have acquired by the act of fleeing our own countries of origin in search of freedom.

Many of us still subscribe, consciously or unconsciously, to stereotypes of African Americans as hypersexualized and animal-like, seeing them as objects rather than people. These stereotypes are so powerful such that black people still sometimes unwittingly or unwillingly internalize them, as Linda Brent and Frederick Douglass did. In this light, a growing number of scholars are critically considering how African Americans portray themselves in the media, especially in entertainment venues such as movies and music. Exacerbating this problem is the fact that, although people of European descent invented the concept of race based on skin color, many of us now refuse to acknowledge racism as a problem. Only we can afford the luxury of thinking that ignoring race—as if we ever really do—renders it irrelevant or harmless. Given the system in which we live, this attitude simply perpetuates existing inequalities.[63]

Racism, as manifested in the historical and current attitudes described in this chapter, does not only harm people of color. By miseducating ourselves and our children about our nation's history, European Americans maintain our own ignorance as well as ignorance of our ignorance, we falsely take credit for the accomplishments of people of color, and we squander the chance to learn from our mistakes. Perpetuating our ignorance about African Americans, we miss out on authentic relationships with them and make ourselves out to be more important than we are. We render ourselves pathetic in our arrogance. Ignoring inequalities based on race, we waste our ability to join the struggle to rectify these inequalities. Maintaining our own unfairly privileged status, we collude in our own failure to be fully human. To the Christian, this sad state of affairs should be unacceptable.

While mitigating the harm our anti-black racist actions and attitudes cause to African Americans—and all people of color—should be our top priority, we cannot do this if we do not understand how racism works. As during slavery and segregation, we all too often continue to treat black bodies as hypersexualized animal objects while relying on black people's humanity to sustain and entertain us. We must own and respond to the trajectory of slavery-segregation-racism. We cannot claim to love justice while we ignore the injustice continually being generated inside our own heads. Christians' moral framework, especially our belief that all people have dignity because we are created in God's image, should compel us to resist this trajectory.

But we are socialized to ignore these dynamics, so where do we begin? We begin by being critical of everything we take for granted. If we hear a news story about a black man slain by police and assume he must have done something wrong, we should notice how our conjecture echoes the casual response of many European Americans to lynching and investigate racial inequity in police violence. If the media demonizes a black mother on welfare, we should notice how this feeds upon the stereotype of black women as hypersexualized and make it our business to discover that the typical welfare recipient is white. And because we are still benefiting from the legacy of slavery, we must listen to people of color. Both in individual reading and research and in actual conversations, we need to ask when, where, and how people of color experience discrimination, and we must believe what they tell us. This is hard, exhausting work. But only by relinquishing what we think is our authority to decide how situations will be addressed, by handing over that power, by listening to people of color and following their lead, can we move toward a better future for our nation and our churches.

10.1057/9780230114715 - Racism and the Image of God, Karen Teel

3

Racism as a Theological Problem

Christianity has always proclaimed the image of God present in human beings and the universal saving power of Christ. Yet, as chapter 2 has shown, the long trajectory of injustice against African Americans—slavery, segregation, and racism—has been perpetrated largely by European American Christians. Christian faith often has not functioned to prevent this abomination, but instead has supported it. Why have white Christians not been compelled to fight this evil? Why is doing so still the exception for us, rather than the rule?

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops wrote in 1979 that racism constitutes a grave injustice and a sin in which Christians are implicated.[1] European American theologians need to wrestle with racism because it is not only a social, political, and economic problem; it is also a theological problem. Racism denies the Jewish and Christian teaching that all human persons are made in the image and likeness of God. While theologians debate about what exactly constitutes this image, at least we can agree that the image of God is present in every human person and that it confers a certain basic human dignity. A racist event represents an insult to the person or group targeted on the level of her/their humanity. If God's image is present in each of us and related to our human dignity, then when we insult one another, we insult God. Rightly understood, enacting or condoning racism is not only a sin; it is heresy. As white Catholic theologian Jon Nilson explains, "Racism and Christianity are fundamentally incompatible."[2] Racism places the racist outside the church.

Intertwined as it is with poverty, sexism, and war, racism ought to be near the top of the list of theological concerns. Indeed, theologians who are persons of color have developed new approaches to theology that take white supremacy as a starting point; black theology

10.1057/9780230114715 - Racism and the Image of God, Karen Teel

is a prominent example. Such thinkers have long argued that white U.S. theologians need to attend to racism, not only as a problem "out there" in society but also as a contradiction internal to the discipline. In one of his most penetrating appeals, James Cone argues that theology's silence in the face of white supremacy is its great sin, and that white U.S. theologians ought not to be able to proceed in good conscience without dealing with it.[3] Likewise, six black theologians addressed "the Catholic reception of Black theology" in a special issue of *Theological Studies* in 2000. In her guest editorial, M. Shawn Copeland states, "White racist supremacy contradicts the very nature of the Church.... Only by confronting and combating White racist supremacy can we take the first steps toward realizing ourselves as the body of Christ."[4] Copeland demonstrates how racism functions not only as a social sin, but also as a cancer in Catholic churches and theology. Despite clear and repeated summonses from our colleagues, only a few white theologians have begun to articulate and repent of the biases inherent in our theological method.

In this chapter, I reread the conventional Christian anthropological tradition as a white scholar consciously attempting to wrestle with racism. First, I trace the historical ambivalence in conventional Christian attitudes toward bodies and the image of God. Second, I critique current trends in theological anthropology done by white theologians, specifically regarding the question of the image of God. Third, I evaluate recent antiracist efforts in white U.S. theology, suggesting one possible strategy for organizing these scattered beginnings into a more precise methodological direction. Since racism and white supremacy are impediments to an authentic search for truth, European American theologians need to follow the lead of African American theologians who urge us to contend with this great sin.

Bodies and the Image of God

Throughout the development of Christian theological anthropology, the image of God has been the primary symbol of what it means to be a human being. During its long and complex history, this symbol has rarely been explicitly identified with the human body. Perhaps this is because Christianity has projected an ambiguous attitude toward the body, its celebration of embodiment in the Incarnation juxtaposed with a lack of respect for bodily needs, desires, functions, and abilities. Here I briefly trace this history in an attempt to provide a theological account of racism's persistence among European American Christians.

Despite Christianity's longstanding misuse and abuse of the body, human beings were originally created as bodies, according to the Genesis creation stories. The texts do not describe the initial creation of a human soul to which a physical body was later added. Rather, in Genesis 1, God declares that God will "make humankind in our image" and then creates humans male and female; Genesis 2, the more detailed of the two accounts, states that "God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life."[5] This indicates that bodies are not only a necessary aspect of the human person, but also part of the image of God; therefore, bodies must be fundamentally good. Yet they have been continually exploited.

The Christian scriptures may be taken to relate the struggles of the incipient Christian church to shape itself and its views. In the Pauline letters, theology of the body is central, and many passages in the Pauline and pseudo-Pauline corpus address issues of body and embodiment, including slavery, homosexuality, celibacy, virginity, and married sexuality. Though retaining the notion of the image of God, Paul's writings display concern about the distracting or even sinful tendencies of the flesh (*sarx*)—a wider concept than, but including, the immoral impulses of the body—and abet pernicious social structures that rely on bodily differences. At the same time, Paul identifies the body (*soma*) as a temple of the Holy Spirit and rejects the idea that it limits human potential before God. In addition, four Gospels that emphasize the earthly life and activities of Jesus were selected for the canon over Gnostic alternatives. Thus, various accounts of what it means to be embodied appear in the Bible itself.

During the patristic era, Christians maintained a suspicion of certain aspects of bodiliness, even though they ultimately rejected the Gnostic notion that the body and all material reality were evil. Peter Brown argues that during the first few centuries of Christianity, early Christians' perceptions of their bodies underwent a major shift, from seeing sexuality as one among many sense appetites needing proper regulation to regarding celibacy as a way of controlling the body that, in bringing about an end to marriage, might prompt Christ's return.[6] Gregory of Nazianzus describes our human bodies and senses both negatively, as obstructing our understanding of God, and positively, as wonders of the created order.[7] In *Confessions*, Augustine famously struggles with concupiscence, which includes but is not limited to what he sees as the willfulness of his body to lead him into sexual sin against his better judgment. In *The Trinity*, he states that according to physical differences, men are the image of God by themselves, but women are not the image of God without their husbands. Yet Augustine also celebrates the possibility for the material or created order, including aspects of the human body, to mirror the trinitarian nature of God.[8] Christian attitudes about sexuality and the body remained ambiguous even as they changed over this early period.

The popularity of Christian virginity and chastity reached its height in the Middle Ages as celibate religious orders flourished. As in earlier times, committed celibacy has been interpreted as liberating insofar as it allowed people—particularly women such as Clare and Scholastica—to choose an alternative to marriage. But some communities also engaged in excesses such as self-flagellation that were done in the name of discipline, purification, or punishment and that indicate a negative attitude toward the body. Others dealt with suffering and the body differently. For example, Julian of Norwich receives visions of God's love manifested in Christ's extreme physical and emotional suffering; she considers her own physical suffering to be a gift from God that strengthens her.[9] Perhaps she saw suffering as a way of imaging Christ. Conversely, Teresa of Ávila describes prayer as a time of spiritual, emotional, and physical uplift and delight.[10] Given the great achievements of medieval Christian European society in art, architecture, and literature, and its simultaneous devastation by plagues and wars, it is not surprising that various attitudes toward the body coexist there as well.

During the Reformation, Martin Luther carries on these complex attitudes toward human bodies. Following Paul and Augustine, he contrasts the spirit and the flesh, often expressing a fairly negative attitude toward bodies' role in human and Christian society. On the one hand, Luther explains that the purpose of good works is to "reduce the body to subjection and purify it of its evil lusts."[11] Excesses of bodily passions are clearly problematic. On the other hand, Luther defends sexual union as a right of married persons, declaring that marriage is a sham unless sexual union occurs. He upholds the right of a married woman to have children and a fulfilling conjugal relationship. If she is married to an impotent man, yet "wishes to have a child, and is unable to remain continent," he counsels her to conceive children through a secret "marriage" with someone else. If her husband will not agree to this, she should desert him and contract marriage with another, "rather than . . . burn or commit adultery."[12] Luther vacillates between recognizing the exercise of sexuality as necessary within marriage and cautioning against excessive passion. Protestant and Catholic thinking up to the present has maintained this ambiguity in theology and Christian life, and bodies have not been positively identified with the image of God in any meaningful way.

Current thinking on the body runs in several strains. For example, thinkers such as Michel Foucault and Judith Butler are interested in questions about what exactly the body is—how it may be represented, described, and spoken about.[13] They focus on social and metaphysical implications of bodies in a way that includes but goes far beyond the biological, asking about how bodies do, may, and should function in society. Although their work is not primarily theological, it affects Christian thinking on the body. In contemporary Roman Catholic theology, European American feminist theologians such as Rosemary Radford Ruether and Elizabeth Johnson discuss the body mainly in terms of gender's significance for salvation. Sexual ethicists also discuss the body's significance, not primarily for salvation but for human relationships. Another approach is taken by Pope John Paul II, whose book *The Theology of the Body* is a collection of Wednesday addresses that consider the question of embodiment. Though not intended as a systematic theology of the body, these addresses reveal a phenomenology of embodiment as complementarity; John Paul draws heavily on traditional Christian beliefs about the gender roles of men and women.[14] Each line of thought contributes something unique to the Christian conversation about the meaning of being human bodies. Yet none provides a definitive beginning of a new theology of the body, one that takes the body seriously and acknowledges its implications for ethics—how we treat one another. This beginning may be achieved by linking the body to the image of God.

Such linkage may initially appear difficult, obscure, or risky, for a variety of reasons. While the following chapters discuss many such reasons implicitly, I address a few here to ground and direct these arguments. First, as various theologians have noted, it can be difficult to make claims about the image of God because we do not know exactly what the image is.[15] The Genesis narrative, the only book in the Hebrew Bible to mention the image of God, refers to the image just three times and never clearly indicates which human characteristic manifests the image. In fact, one Hebrew Bible scholar suggests that for Israelite peoples the idea of the image of God may never have had a single, fixed meaning, so that this apparent omission or lack of clarity in the Genesis text may in fact be an ingenious gloss over a vexing problem.[16] This lack of clarity may actually encourage us to consider multiple aspects of human personhood as part of the image of God.

10.1057/9780230114715 - Racism and the Image of God, Karen Teel

Second, claiming that the body is the image of God may appear to contradict classical Christian teachings about God. To discourage idolatry, for example, Christians have emphasized that God is spirit, and consequently the image of God has been thought to be spiritual, not physical. Thus, theologians have consistently identified the image as an intangible human characteristic—most often a cognitive faculty such as rationality or a capacity for a special relationship with God. The image has been thought to distinguish us from other animals, and since having a physical body is what we share with them, we have separated the essence of the human from the body. Yet having a human form also distinguishes us from nonhuman creatures. The problem here may be dualism, not a natural opposition of spirit and matter. In fact, Jewish rabbinical tradition often ascribes some sort of body to God, though not necessarily one that is exactly like ours; Alon Goshen Gottstein—who suggests that God's body is made of light and that the original image of God in Adam was luminosity—points out, "From a perspective that sees body and soul united, the thought that the body is the image of God seems far less problematic."[17] Even within conventional Christianity, the historical disparagement of the body appears blasphemous in light of the belief in Jesus as the fully human incarnation of God: God does indeed have a body, a human body. Such factors may not completely eliminate the danger of ascribing image status to bodies, but they do perhaps render it less severe.

Third, some may take the fact that physical bodies grow old, fall apart, and die as evidence that bodies cannot possibly image a God who is eternal life. Yet this conclusion is not inevitable. From the perspective of a Jewish nursing home chaplain, Hershel Jonah Matt suggests that both cognitive and bodily functions point to the image of God in human beings. Observing that both kinds of functions undergo this natural process of decay, Matt asks what it can mean that the image of God—reflected by all our strengths—appears to have "faded out and disappeared" upon death. If God is eternal, how can God's image die? Matt concludes that although the unique manifestation of the image of God in an individual does indeed vanish upon that person's death, he or she nevertheless lives on in the memory of God and will return to life on the day of resurrection: "Then will the full measure of YHVH's power and justice and love be made manifest, each ailing, fading, disappearing image of God will then be healed, renewed, restored."[18] Christianity, with its teaching of the resurrection of the body, certainly has the capacity to embrace such a claim. Chapter 9 will take up this question of uniqueness, especially physical uniqueness, and the image of God.

A fourth and related objection concerns the possibility that, taking bodies to image God, we will use bodily differences to determine the degree to which certain bodies image God. Upon reflection, however, it becomes obvious that this has already happened, as a direct result of emphasizing cognition as the most divine aspect of humans. Throughout Christian history, those in power, usually European men, have made judgments about who counts as fully human. They have based these judgments on the extent to which they think the people in question—women, Native Americans, Africans—share the cognitive faculty they believe constitutes the image of God. They have denigrated bodiliness as inferior to spirituality and devalued people associated more closely with bodiliness, especially women. Christian churches have traditionally denied ordination to people with nonmale bodies and sometimes also to people with nonwhite and nonheterosexual bodies. The male body—sometimes the white, heterosexual, male body—has been considered the only body that is compatible with the image of God. Although bodily differences such as sex and race are ostensibly denied a role in the image, they have nevertheless been assumed to correspond with the degree to which a person images God. This reasoning has had terrible consequences: it is the appalling history of patriarchy and of racism in all its forms. Maintaining ambivalence toward bodies and denying bodies a positive role in the image of God has led to major problems, which might well be redressed by changing these conventional attitudes.

While I am aware of no sustained efforts in contemporary Christian theological anthropology to envision bodies as the image of God, I am not the first to suggest that stressing bodiliness could prove helpful. Colleen Griffith, for example, cites a recent theological emphasis on the fact that we share physicality with the rest of creation in her brief proposal that exploring what our bodies have in common should precede any discussion of differences, so as to preclude our differences—she prefers the term “distinctiveness”—from separating us.[19] While I agree with Griffith that highlighting our similarities is vital to eliminating discrimination, I think we need to consider commonalities and differences simultaneously. We will have to understand the differences among our bodies, especially those that have been socially constructed, in order to comprehend what our experiences may truly share in common.

Chapter 2 showed that in the peculiarly American system of chattel slavery begun in the seventeenth century, European Americans used skin color to determine who counted as fully human—a disastrous interpretation of bodily difference. As Americans and as Christians, we now renounce the notion that some people are "more human" than others, but we still struggle to overcome the tendencies ingrained in us by centuries of this belief. Despite its troubled past, our belief in the image of God can foster this effort, especially if we allow our bodies, in their similarities and differences, to play a positive role in the image. Though this project may be fraught with difficulty, the risks of not interrupting our present approach's inadequacies are greater still.

The Image of God in White Theology

So far in Christian history, the idea that the image of God is a spiritual or cognitive faculty has failed to command respect for all persons as made in God's image. Recent work by European American Christian anthropologists rightly stresses that every human person carries the image of God. Can these theologies compel white Christians to fight racism? Do they prompt us to insist that every body deserves respect as a human person created in God's image?

Hoping to avoid the limitations of the "cognitive faculty" approach, contemporary scholars of all backgrounds typically avoid isolating only one human characteristic as essential to or constitutive of human nature. One such solution is to carefully distinguish "image of God" language from "person" language. On the one hand, the "image of God" may be located in the capacity for relationship—with God, Jesus, and other people. Here the image is still described as a *single* characteristic, although exercising this capacity requires utilizing various skills and faculties. On the other hand, "persons" are described in terms of *multiple* characteristics (including cognitive ones), in order to acknowledge human diversity and difference as natural and God-given. For example, Ian McFarland, a scholar of European descent, resists "anthropological essentialism" in his concern to respect human difference. He discusses human nature in terms of various "symptoms," most notably dominion, sexual difference, and fruitfulness. Similarly, African American theologian Dwight Hopkins identifies three characteristics—culture, self, and race—as foundational to personhood and theological anthropology. And in white feminist theology, some discussion has been revolving around whether anthropology should be dual-nature, single-nature, transformative, multipolar, or something beyond any of these.[20] In these accounts, physical human bodies sometimes function in personhood, but usually they do not function in the image of God.

10.1057/9780230114715 - Racism and the Image of God, Karen Teel

To take one example, McFarland argues in *Difference & Identity* that only Jesus *is* the image of God. Human personhood is mediated through Jesus, so the rest of us are *in* the image of God rather than *being* the image of God. This means that we are called to relationships with other persons, relationships that are always mediated by Jesus. McFarland identifies sexual difference, which has a physical dimension, as a "symptom" of personhood. He grants that physical realities have a role in imaging God, even stating that "Human beings can be persons because the Word assumed human flesh in Jesus of Nazareth."[21] This seems to indicate a positive value for embodiment. But McFarland also stresses the metaphorical "body of Christ" over physical embodiment, which he considers ambiguous.[22] In *The Divine Image*, he argues extensively that the image of God says more about God than about humans: "Human beings reflect the divine image only indirectly, insofar as their lives are understood to be constituted and sustained by relation to the head [Jesus]."[23] This argument may succeed in de-emphasizing the idea that humans image God in an intangible way, but only at the cost of denying that ordinary humans are the image of God. I believe that if we pay attention to the body, we can say more than this about how people image God.

Do these contemporary approaches to theological anthropology improve the capacity of image-of-God language to encourage respect for all people in our bodily differences? Certainly we could interpret the "capacity for relationship" as another intangible characteristic that gives rise to the same old problems, for people who seem to do better at having relationships with one another and with God could be judged to be more worthwhile human beings. In a promising move, however, many Christian anthropologists are using the emphasis on relationship to acknowledge that an adequate account of the image of God must have ethical implications. Kathryn Tanner gives a description of actively imaging God that is typical for a white scholar:

> To be created in the image of God means…to have a particular vocation, one of fellowship and communion with God in which one uses all one's powers to glorify God and carry out God's purposes.… [H]uman beings reflect God by adopting God's own project of universal well-being. Like the shepherd kings of antiquity, they mediate God's blessings, as best they are able, to both their own kind and the rest of creation—for example, replenishing the earth and helping it to body forth bountifully, furthering the prospects for human community by protecting and caring for the weak, the infirm, and the oppressed.[24]

Similarly to Tanner, when considering the problem of human suffering inflicted by other people, Mary Catherine Hilkert argues that

> the "image of God" in human persons is revealed as an image desecrated, the image of Christ crucified. Only if human communities and individuals rise up in indignation, protest, solidarity, and action on behalf of those whose basic human dignity has been violated can the image of God also be revealed as compassionate love in solidarity with us even unto death.[25]

These statements portray imaging God as being in right relationship with God, with people, and with all of creation. They show a much-needed awareness that all is not right with the world, that people are suffering and that assisting them is a way of imaging God. If physical suffering is included as something to be resisted in "caring for…the oppressed," this definition can even be taken to reveal a concern for human bodies. People are certainly suffering, and judging by my reading of the Gospels, working to alleviate suffering is the right response. So perhaps this approach can urge at least some Christians to respect all bodies.

Yet, considering these statements closely, we discover something troubling. Tanner describes imaging God as "protecting and caring for the weak, the infirm, and the oppressed," and Hilkert as "ris[ing] up in indignation, protest, solidarity, and action on behalf of those whose basic human dignity has been violated." This call to the powerful to image God by standing in solidarity with the oppressed may indeed be one possible way for people who are privileged to live out the image of God. But what about the people who are weak, infirm, oppressed, violated? Neither thinker speaks to the moral situation of people who are oppressed or discusses how oppressed people image God. In this perspective, do people who are oppressed image God by caring for each other, or for themselves? Or, more disturbingly, are we to conclude that being oppressed renders people unable to image God? Though surely their authors do not intend it, statements like these could be taken to imply that although everyone may passively share the image of God, only privileged people can image God actively, because we are the ones who can choose to "protect and care for the weak, infirm, and oppressed." They imply that some human beings have the power to damage or even destroy the image of God in others. Thus we may end up where we began—with the problematic notion that some people image God better or more fully than others. Ultimately, these contemporary European American theologies do not provide sufficient grounds to compel Christians to respect every body as made in the image of God.

The intention here is not to suggest that scholars like Tanner and Hilkert intend to carry on the objectionable tradition of claiming that some people are more human than others. Rather, this difficulty reveals that such explorations into theological anthropology are done by people in privileged positions who do not fully comprehend our power. At least two distinct issues arise here. First, despite good intentions, these thinkers fail to notice—or at least to convey—that imaging God cannot mean the same thing for everyone. White scholars rarely note that people who are oppressed are not merely passive recipients of the actions of the powerful, but actively image God in myriad ways, including many of their responses to oppression. Second, European American scholars usually do not attend explicitly to the fact that we ourselves are members of advantaged or oppressor groups. As such, we do better to begin not with the goal of "caring for the poor"—however well-intentioned, this remains a paternalistic impulse—but with uncovering and dismantling oppressive structures. To do this, we have to be honest about how we participate in and perpetuate these structures. On both counts, deep attentiveness to the theologies of our colleagues of color proves a helpful and necessary starting point.

Many European American theologians need to undergo a drastic shift in perspective. The subsequent chapters of this book call upon womanist thinkers to help us address our blind spots. Attending to bodily differences, which often correspond to situational differences, can begin to make these issues salient for those of us who have been accustomed to speaking for everyone.

Racism in White Theology

For decades now, African American scholars, well aware of U.S. society's hostility toward them, have been calling for plain talk about bodies, sexuality, and racism. In particular, womanist theologians are beginning to contend with the longstanding Christian and U.S. ambiguity toward not only black bodies, but all human bodies. Womanists often cite Toni Morrison's imperative, placed in the mouth of Baby Suggs: "Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it.... *You* got to love it, you! This is flesh I'm talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved."[26] Key to this effort, albeit sometimes implicit, is the Christian teaching that all human persons are made in God's image. Black scholars know from experience the clash of the trajectory of slavery, segregation, and racism with the Christian belief in the image of God, though most have not explored it at length.[27]

European American theologians, too, have always worked out of our particular context—privilege. But we have not acknowledged this, theologizing as though our default mode is to make universal statements that apply to all of humanity. Thus, U.S. Christian theology, as dominated by people of European descent, plays a role in perpetuating systemic racism. As noted, black theologians have been pointing this out for decades; white scholar Jon Nilson has comprehensively documented the consistency with which these thinkers have been calling our attention to the problem of white supremacy within the discipline since at least the 1970s.[28]

Ironically, European American theologians have taken Latin American liberation theology much more seriously than we have taken black theology of liberation. For example, Gustavo Gutiérrez published *A Theology of Liberation* in 1971,[29] and Alfred Hennelly refers to Gutiérrez's book as "a blueprint for a different kind of edifice…a splendid prototype, an excellent exemplar of what a new and liberating theology looked like in print." Hennelly later comments, with telling understatement, "It is interesting to note that [James Cone's *A Black Theology of Liberation*] was published a year *before* Gustavo Gutiérrez's groundbreaking volume."[30] Discussing Latin American liberation theology as the premier liberation theology movement from which others took their bearings is problematic, as it risks ignoring the independent roots of those movements. In the case of black theology, Cone reports that when he wrote *A Black Theology of Liberation*, he "was completely unaware of the beginnings of liberation theology in the Third World, especially in Latin America."[31] Without question, Latin American liberation theology has been foundational. But Cone's work—a U.S.-based theology of liberation—should have proven at least as "groundbreaking" for European American theologians as Gutiérrez's. The fact that it has not illuminates the extent to which European American theologians need to examine our own prejudices. Cone illuminates the breadth of our denial:

> White North American and European theologians hardly ever mentioned the sin of racism in their public lectures and writings during the 1960's and 70's….They engaged Latin Americans on class contradictions, talked to feminists about gender issues, and dialogued with Jews

> about Christianity and Anti-Semitism. However, when the time came to talk about theology and racism, they initially could not believe that we had the audacity to engage them in a serious intellectual discussion about theology and its task. What could blacks possibly know about theology?[32]

Cone first issued his challenge in the 1960s. Since the 1980s, a few white theologians have attempted to respond, both directly and indirectly. Barbara Hilkert Andolsen has explored racism and the women's movement; John R. Connolly has called for a shift in the Catholic understanding of revelation based on Cone's central category of liberation from oppression; Mary Elizabeth Hobgood has described how racism and other inequities harm even the "privileged"; Mary C. Doak has proposed that Cornel West's thought can assist some Catholics in overcoming our evasion of black theology; Alex Mikulich has grounded himself in black Catholic political theology to develop an ethical understanding of whiteness as social construct; James W. Perkinson (a Protestant thinker) has conceptualized white supremacy theologically as a white problem demanding white transformation, a call also made by Jennifer Harvey, Karin A. Case, and Robin Hawley Gorsline; Laurie Cassidy and Alex Mikulich have edited a volume on Catholic theologians and white privilege; and Jon Nilson has appealed for the moral conversion of white Catholic theologians to enter into serious engagement with black theology.[33] This list is virtually exhaustive, and its brevity is shameful.

All but the first two of these works have appeared since 2000, which may mean that at long last, more of us are taking notice. In particular, Cassidy and Mikulich's volume contains essays by nine European American theologians who interrogate their scholarly methods to find out how they are perpetuating white privilege and racism within Catholic theology itself. Their work makes clear that our inability to hear the appeals of our colleagues who are persons of color can serve as evidence of both personal and social racism. For example, Charles E. Curran offers an autobiographical model for how we might begin to train ourselves to overcome this blindness. Considering his own corpus, Curran notes that he identified racism, poverty, and war as important social issues in 1982 but never followed up on racism in later scholarship, as he did on poverty and war. He states that he needs conversion on several levels in order to overcome this personal deficiency, which mirrors the deficiency in white U.S. Catholic theology in general.[34] Will white scholars begin to pay collective attention to the problem of racism and white supremacy now that our colleagues who are persons of color *and* some of our white colleagues are bringing it to the forefront?[35]

For scholars of European descent, such as myself, failing to address racism is at best a serious sin of omission and at worst a willful and self-serving refusal to see what is really going on. If we have been conscious of our privilege, we have not talked about it. But we can no longer ignore the need to interrogate how our privilege affects our work. Our history of supporting slavery, segregation, and racism renders this an imperative.

Entering into serious engagement with black theology must mean more than permitting its perspectives to enlighten isolated components of our arguments. This is mere tokenism. Cone, who urges white Christians to "become black with God," states, "No white theologian has ever taken the oppression of blacks as a point of departure for analyzing God's activity in contemporary America....Because white theology has consistently preserved the integrity of the community of oppressors, I conclude that it is not Christian theology at all."[36] To date, the only book-length attempt to answer this charge directly is Perkinson's.

The present book takes womanist theologies as the norm by which to critique white European and North American theological ideas. Rather than assuming that the European tradition is basically sound, perhaps just needing some minor adjustments, I begin by presuming that—as black scholars have been telling us for decades—it needs a complete overhaul. Apprenticing myself to womanist theologians, I listen for what they can tell me about myself as a white U.S. theologian and Christian. Ultimately, my task—for which this book can only be a starting point, building on the others I have mentioned—is not to become an expert on black women, but to unpack the insidious whiteness of European theology as it has persecuted black women, and in the process to discover how I, a white Christian, can strive to become an antiracist Christian.

In order to discover how our theologies perpetuate structures of white supremacy, European American theologians need to turn to non-European perspectives to serve as the norm by which we critique ourselves. To transform theology into a truly antiracist endeavor, we must—at least temporarily—abandon our primary reliance on European thinkers, relinquishing control of the conversation to our colleagues who have eyes to see our complicity in white supremacy. This is not to suggest categorically that all theologians who are persons of color are equally well qualified to critique the racist structures of society and theology, while white theologians are not. Traditionally, however, white theologians have ignored these structures, so for now we should take our cues from those who have faced the racism within our discipline and within ourselves. Putting aside the master's tools, we may be able to start resisting our unearned white privilege and, eventually, begin producing antiracist white theology.

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Combat Breathing: Katie Geneva Cannon

In an 1858 treatise defending the institution of slavery, Thomas R.R. Cobb of Georgia penned these lines:

> The negro [*sic*] is not malicious. His disposition is to forgive injuries, and to forget the past. His gratitude is sometimes enduring, and his fidelity often remarkable. His passions and affections are seldom very strong, and are never very lasting.…A few days blot out the memory of his most bitter bereavement. His natural affection is not strong, and consequently he is cruel to his own offspring, and suffers little by separation from them.[1]

Cobb portrays Africans as adaptable, easily excited to loyalty and gratitude, and careless about family ties—well suited for a life of slavery and frequent sale. Though Cobb mentions that some people believe the cruelties of slavery and color prejudice may dampen Africans' will to work, he declines "to inquire as to the truth of these apologies."[2] He will not grant that Africans' supposedly inferior traits may derive from the need to survive, or the knowledge that they might be punished for mourning the loss of kin, let alone the desire to prevent their own sale, or the awareness that individuals could not single-handedly change the slave system. Above all, Cobb's judgment reveals that he does not know any "negro" personally; he has no interest in knowing one.

Of course, slave narratives attest that slaves were anything but indifferent to being sold away from their family members. Though Cobb would have had access to such accounts, he does not seem to have considered them seriously. Had he done so, he might have been moved, for example, by Mary Prince's recollection of the auction that scattered her mother's children:

> Oh dear! I cannot bear to think of that day,—it is too much.—It recalls the great grief that filled my heart, and the woeful thoughts that passed

10.1057/9780230114715 - Racism and the Image of God, Karen Teel

> to and fro through my mind, whilst listening to the pitiful words of my poor mother, weeping for the loss of her children.... When I left my dear little brothers and the house in which I had been brought up, I thought my heart would burst.[3]

Far from casual acceptance, Prince's memory, still fresh decades later, shows that all of her family were devastated by their separation. Indeed, her story reveals that her survival depends on her ability to affirm her own humanity in the face of continuous exploitation by her owners, who—even those she describes as "kind"—treat her as less than human, as property.

Today most European Americans can recognize that Cobb's account draws on severely limited and biased observation, wishful thinking, and flights of imagination. As a wealthy and powerful European American man, he does not need to care about what is happening in the hearts and heads of slaves. He can create an artificial reality that encourages him to continue his comfortable existence, advocate for slavery and secession, and die fighting to preserve the Confederacy. Cobb willfully ignores the reality of slavery; moreover, he ignores his own ignorance. He chooses to disregard the suffering of millions. He pretends it is not there.

But Prince, at the other end of the lash, cannot afford the luxury of dismissing the thoughts and emotions of those who are "other" than herself—her owners, and Europeans in general. Beatings, impossible workloads, and the constant unsettlement of sale saturate slave life. In order to survive, Prince must cultivate a profound insight into her owners' minds. Later in her account, describing a subsequent sale that takes her even farther from her family, she remarks, "Oh the Buckra [white] people who keep slaves think that black people are like cattle, without natural affection. But my heart tells me it is far otherwise."[4] She knows she is not as her owners imagine her. In the face of the systematic disavowal of the humanity of people of African descent that was New World slavery, such confidence may be both admirable and inevitable.

In fact, Mary Prince's understanding of reality is far more accurate and complex than Thomas Cobb's. Disregarding facts that might discomfort him, Cobb adheres to his own distorted construal of reality. He knows neither those "other" than himself nor the truth behind his own motivations. The myths he perpetuates have mutated through the centuries, continuously obstructing the vision of European Americans. Prince, however, not only knows who she is, she also knows what her owners think of her, and she knows that they do not truly know her. This incisive, multilayered understanding of reality has been passed down by generations of African Americans living under the trajectory of slavery, segregation, and racism.

While chapter 8 explores Thomas Cobb's knowing, the knowing of the oppressor, this chapter investigates Mary Prince's knowing, the knowing of the oppressed. Contemporary womanist ethicist Katie Geneva Cannon asserts that this clarity of vision, this African American mode of knowing, is still exercised today. She explains,

> It means that you know danger without having to be taught.... It is what June Jordan calls "jungle posture"...what Ntozake Shange calls "the combat stance"...It is like when Sojourner Truth said, "Nobody lifts me into carriages or over mud puddles, but I am a woman." You know where the minefields are...there is wisdom...You are in touch with the ancestors...and it is from the gut, not rationally figured out. Black women have to use this all the time, of course, the creativity is still there, but we are not fools...we call it the "epistemological privileges of the oppressed."[5]

By labeling this kind of knowing as a privilege, Cannon indicates that those who experience oppression in U.S. society actually understand reality better than those who do not. In this chapter, I inquire into the origins and content of this knowing, and I present this clearheaded understanding of reality, this ability to see what is really going on, as a way of imaging God. I suggest that by paying attention, admitting that people who are "not like us" see better than we do, and seeking to learn from them, European Americans can begin to correct our own vision of what is going on in our society and understand what we can do about it.

Seeing What Is There in History

Mary Prince understood that Europeans did not see her as fully human like themselves, capable of natural human emotions like familial affection, or of making reasonable, moral decisions. Katie Cannon summarizes the moral situation of enslaved women by stating that they were defined as subhuman property and not permitted to determine their own destinies.[6] When they attempted to act morally, their agency was delimited by a total lack of freedom. The ideology of slavery considered black women to be even further removed from humanity than black men: under the Three-Fifths Compromise, a male slave counted as three-fifths of a person, but female slaves not at all. Thus, while black men were partly counted in the population, black women were rendered completely invisible. White women were not counted either, but they were not demonized as black women were.

While slavery caused terrible suffering for all enslaved, Cannon points out that women suffered in more diverse ways than men. Quoting bell hooks' description of black women's fourfold exploitation, Cannon explains, "[T]he black male slave was primarily exploited as a laborer in the fields; the black female was exploited as a laborer in the fields, a worker in the domestic household, a breeder, and as an object of white male sexual assault."[7] Cannon distinguishes three ways black women suffered: as "property," "brood-sow," and "work-ox."[8]

As "property," the enslaved black woman could not make her own life choices, such as where or with whom to live, her sexual partners or husbands (if she was allowed to marry), how many children she had, when she worked, or what work she did. The master's whims governed every aspect of her life. Along with his house, land, and tools, and—in a less dehumanized but also a real way—his wife and children, the master counted the black slave woman as an item he owned to increase his profits and social status. Black people were "movable property," bought and sold without regard for interpersonal ties. Indeed, Mary Prince reports being sold four times, ending with a master who refused to accept money in exchange for her emancipation even after she left his household during a stay in England, where he could not legally hold her as a slave. Prince could not return to her home and husband in Antigua without risking re-enslavement.

As "brood-sow," the enslaved black woman was treated as a means to the owner's financial and personal gain. Her body was used to produce more workers, and white society denied her parental feelings, holding that her childbearing did not create a family but merely produced subhuman laborers to inflate the owner's wealth. The enslaved woman's ability to increase the slave population ensured that she was both sexually exploited by white men and encouraged to have early and frequent intercourse with black men. White society blamed her rape not on the rapist but on what it imagined to be her own insatiable sexual desire, which in turn was thought to prove her inferiority.[9] Thus, she was systematically deprived of her right to determine who would have access to her body. Further, European Americans deemed women of African descent to carry slavery, or subhumanity, like a gene in their bodies.[10] The principle of *partus sequitur ventrem* asserted that every enslaved woman's child followed her into slavery, regardless of paternity. White rapists were not affected, nor did society expect them to provide for these babies. Apparently, only black women's genes were considered contaminated since, in another exploitation of their fertility, enslaved women breastfed white children as well as their own. Though Mary Prince does not mention having children, she describes caring for white children and being forced to bathe one of her masters, which she considers immoral.[11]

As "work-ox," the black woman labored in the fields with black men.[12] White society relied on her considerable physical strength, while decrying it as an unwomanly and ultimately subhuman characteristic. If she fell behind, regardless of circumstances such as sickness, pregnancy, or nursing, she risked beatings or worse. Mary Prince, who worked primarily as a domestic (house) slave, reports regular physical assault; for example, she received several floggings for breaking a jar that had been badly cracked already, and once they were in England, her owners berated her and tried to throw her out of the house for moving slowly when ill.[13] Further, the enslaved woman's cycle of pregnancy and childbirth was treated like that of livestock, or worse; she was allowed no time to attend to birth, nursing, or childrearing. By contrast, white women, "ladies" who carried the "civilized" gene, had to be protected.[14] They needed extra care and weeks of rest following childbirth; often they did not even nurse their own children lest they weary themselves or damage their looks. Enslaved women filled this gap.

In sum, the moral situation of the black woman under slavery was deprivation of human dignity. She was not considered human, and she knew it. Mary Prince's story demonstrates that enslaved persons could not adopt the ethical standards of white people because such standards presumed equality between persons; if they tried to do so, they were punished. Prince describes a hungry slave boy who was whipped for taking some rice; later the master's son drove a bayonet through the boy's foot, incensed because he had tried to defend himself by telling the master that the son stole rice also.[15] Of necessity, enslaved people developed a moral code that focused on survival as the central virtue. They relied on their knowledge that they were children of God, who understood them and their troubles. They found the courage to take in orphaned children, gather secretly to pray, submit outwardly to the master while retaining their own individuality and desire for freedom, cleverly deceive the master to avoid punishment or death, and escape whenever possible. Mary Prince never gave up her conviction that slavery was evil, and more than once she attempted to escape or purchase her freedom.

When slavery officially ended at the close of the Civil War in 1865, black women and men suddenly owned their bodies and labor.[16] Yet Cannon stresses that black women's moral situation changed little. Despite initial efforts at equality, Reconstruction was characterized by separation of the races and by inferior treatment for people of African descent. They were denied citizen status—although the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution, ratified in 1870, granted black men the right to vote, poll taxes and literacy tests prevented many from doing so—and white misperceptions of black women did not change much. With Reconstruction's failure, the white view of black people as subhuman persisted. Jim and Jane Crow laws ensured that European Americans would not have to treat black men and women as equals and mandated the separation of certain kinds of bodies, thus continuing to "control even the most personal spatial and social aspects of Black life."[17] These laws excluded black women from employment; while a black man could sharecrop or work in a factory, a black woman could only clean the houses of white families, especially those for whom her husband sharecropped. Under this arrangement, black families lived literally in the backyards of white households.[18] This replicated old patterns of sexual exploitation. Nominally, slave owner became employer, but black women's situation was still circumscribed by his gaze.

Some black people migrated to northern cities in search of opportunity. But segregation was just as entrenched there, though it took on a more polite form.[19] Ostensibly, many employment options were available, but black people could secure only the most menial and lowest-paying jobs. Black women struggled to find housing for their families and to alleviate their dismal living conditions. Cannon maintains that in some ways, the black woman was even worse off under Jim Crow than she had been under slavery. Under slavery, the black woman could count on minimal protection from the master, because as her owner he had a stake in her survival. Now she continued to endure objectification and dehumanization without what little protection slavery might have offered.

Advances came gradually. Various governmental programs assisted black families, and between World Wars I and II, a few black women became teachers, medical workers, even lawyers. But when the incipient feminist movement began to secure jobs for women in factories that had been traditionally staffed by men, black women found that although white feminists advocated sexual equality, they were not necessarily interested in racial equality.[20] Some black women who obtained jobs in segregated factories during World War II had to give them up when the soldiers returned home. At this time, the number of black women who were the single heads of households began to rise.[21] Black soldiers who fought in World War II and found a welcoming reception in Europe returned to find that nothing had changed.[22]

During this period, the black church, clandestine during slavery, emerged as a public institution.[23] Only here did black people have real power. The church building was the center of the community, hosting all types of gatherings and events. Black women continued to turn to the Bible, especially the Exodus story and the prophets, for comfort and courage. Forged in the crucible of slavery, their faith sustained them through the horrors of Jim Crow. They utilized their gifts and talents much more extensively in the black churches than they could in the wider society. They fed the hungry, cared for the sick, welcomed the stranger and found her a job, formed mother's clubs, taught, and engaged in activism.[24] At first, both men and women guided black churches. But as slavery receded further into the past and the black church gained more influence, the differences between men's and women's roles increased. Black women played a vital part in black church life, but the ministers were almost all men, who often portrayed women negatively in their preaching.[25] Although these churches have provided African Americans a place of rest and renewal, they have also imitated the sexism of white institutions.

With Katie Cannon as our guide to this history, we can clearly see that during most of the history of the lands that became the United States, European Americans have failed to recognize the full humanity of black women. Contemporary black women's ability to see what is really going on is deeply rooted in this history. They know that their moral situation in the United States remains circumscribed by racist, sexist, and classist misconstruals of their humanity.

Seeing What Is There Today

Despite legal equality for black people, Cannon maintains that color still determines destiny in America.[26] The election of the first African American president of the United States notwithstanding, current events corroborate her claim. To give just one example, a recent news story describes unincorporated Southern black communities that lack municipal water or sewer service or garbage pickup, although they are located on the borders of affluent white towns.[27] The wealth of these towns depends on luxurious golf resorts built and staffed largely by the labor of the black women and men living on the edges of the prosperous areas. Various reasons are suggested for the imbalance, including racism of town officials and black residents' aversion to higher taxes, but the most likely explanation seems to be that no one in authority has bothered to do anything. Ignorance is a factor: despite the evidence, one mayor expresses disbelief that black people make up the unincorporated parts of his town. Reporter Shaila Dewan shrewdly notes that "even if officials [are] not motivated by racism, historic racial inequities [are] part of the equation." One finds no white communities without basic services on the edges of such towns. Even today, some black people are still living in the backyards of whites.

Given this situation, it is not surprising that European Americans often fail to respect black women's bodies as human, as female, or as the image of God. Cannon articulates this contemporary situation very clearly, showing that black women's moral situation is still a struggle to survive.[28] She does not intend to exclude the experiences of other women, especially women of color.[29] But the desperate yet creative survival struggles of black women have distinct characteristics that can be instructive. In particular, Cannon describes black Christian women who turn to their faith for hope and strength as prophets who inspire the entire community.[30] They mine the teachings of Jesus to carve out lives of integrity in the face of oppression.

Cannon identifies several issues at stake for black women in contemporary U.S. society, including colorism and pigmentocracy, whites not seeing black women as women, black women's bodies as texts, class in the United States, and black women's position in the black churches. Directly or indirectly, each of these issues offers clues about black women's bodies in contemporary churches and society. The first three issues, according to Cannon, are "inscribed on the bodies of Black people."[31] Careful evaluation reveals that they are mainly inscribed on black women's bodies, and understanding them can help European Americans gain insight into historical and contemporary race relations in the United States.

Colorism and Pigmentocracy

The first issue inscribed on black women's bodies is "colorism." Colorism is the notion that black people, particularly women, who have lighter skin are more attractive than those with darker skin. This is a legacy from slavery, when European Americans thought lighter-skinned black people were more like them, more "human," and often assigned lighter-skinned slaves to house positions where visitors would see them. Colorism has been intensified by the black community's internalization of it. Alice Walker defines it as "prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color,"[32] distinct from white racism and internal to the black community. According to the insidious hierarchy of colorism, only light-skinned girls and women can be beautiful; darker girls and women can only hope that their ugliness is not so extreme as to offend.[33] A closely related phenomenon, "pigmentocracy" correlates skin tone with intelligence—the lighter the skin, the smarter the woman.

Cannon contends that colorism should be a central concern of womanist scholarship because it has so deeply affected black women's self-esteem. She concurs with black literary scholar Mary Helen Washington that "the idea of beauty as defined by white America has been an assault on the personhood of the black woman."[34] Discussions of colorism and pigmentocracy do not appear in novels by and about black men, but they are so pervasive for black girls and women that "the concept of physical beauty is one of the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought."[35] As a result of white discrimination and black internalization of that discrimination, black women sometimes see themselves as ugly and stupid because of their skin color, hair texture, and body type, and a young black girl knows what future to expect according to her beauty and intelligence as defined by her skin tone. Two experiences Cannon had as a child illustrate this point: she was rejected by her lighter-skinned aunt, who did not want people to know they were related (colorism); and although she yearned and practiced from a young age to become a teacher, she knew that since teaching was only open to smarter—that is, lighter-skinned—black women, she would grow up to be a domestic like her mother (pigmentocracy).[36]

Seeing Black Women as Women

Black women also teach us that European Americans see African Americans as so different from ourselves that we fail to see black women as women. Alice Walker best reveals white women's failure of imagination regarding black women when she says that white women do not envision black women with vaginas; that is, white women do not understand that black women have the basic, normal concerns of human females regarding subjects like children, husbands, family, sexual desire and pleasure, home, and personal appearance.[37] Walker realized this when she saw Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*, in which 39 women of other races are depicted as vaginas, but the plate representing black women carries human faces. This disconnect makes it difficult for black women to experience solidarity with white women.

If white women do not see black women as women, how do we see them? Simply as black. Walker reports a telling conversation she has with many majority-white audiences.[38] Typically, an audience member asks her if she thinks womanist thinkers should spend time in the black community. When Walker answers yes, the questioner accuses her of abandoning the women's community. When Walker replies that of course there are women in the black community, she is met with a blank stare. The questioner, thinking women's concerns are only addressed in the (white) feminist movement, cannot see that black women are women no matter which "community" they are in at the moment. White people have difficulty distinguishing black Americans' experiences of society from their own while also seeing common ground among women. Cannon and Walker prompt European Americans to reconsider the unconscious assumption that black people are all the same and are fundamentally different from whites.

Of course, Cannon and Walker do not claim that black women's experiences are the same as white women's. Audre Lorde also reminds white women, "Some problems we share as women, some we do not. You fear your children will grow up to join the patriarchy and testify against you, we fear our children will be dragged from a car and shot down in the street, and you will turn your back on the reasons they are dying."[39] Black and white women share the experience of loving, committed motherhood, but we do not harbor the same fears for our children. Black women always have to be concerned with survival; white women usually do not. Yet Cannon, Lorde, and Walker emphasize that the basic experiences of being female have many similarities across racial lines, and they call upon white women to recognize this. Our failure to do so clouds our vision of black women as fully human.

Black Women's Bodies as Texts

The third issue Cannon identifies as central to womanist scholarship is "Black women's bodies as texts."[40] Under slavery, white men literally and figuratively inscribed black women's bodies as their property. Some women were physically branded; all were emotionally scarred; thus, black women carry in their bodies the marks of slavery and oppression. Sethe, the main character in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, is a classic example.[41] Her whole back is scarred from being whipped when she was about to give birth. The markings elicit reactions from three people: a white woman, Amy, who acts as Sethe's midwife; Sethe's mother-in-law, Baby Suggs; and a black male friend from the plantation, Paul D, who becomes Sethe's lover. Since her scars are on her back, Sethe cannot see them; she relies on others to describe them. Amy portrays the fresh wounds as a chokecherry tree in blossom, and Paul D the scars as a filigree of wrought iron, but Baby Suggs, whom Sethe reaches shortly after the baby's birth, simply shakes her head in silence and gets on with dressing the wound. All three instantly recognize the wounds as the mark of enslavement. White people inscribe Sethe's body in other ways as well, but her physical scars are the ones that are visible. Even after she escapes him, Sethe's body remains marked as the white man's property.

Writing about *Beloved*, Mae Henderson describes black women's bodies as having been taken apart and put back together by white people throughout the course of black women's history in this country.[42] Cannon asks why white people and black men can read black women's bodies better than black women themselves. Baby Suggs, who not only dressed and cared for the wound but also probably suffered similar injuries, could or would find no words to describe it.[43] In the end, Henderson argues, Sethe makes her own story by reinterpreting her act of killing her own children as saving them from a worse fate, rather than as a heinous crime. Cannon implies that black women need to learn to read what has been inscribed on each other's bodies, reinterpreting the past together and determining their future on their own terms.

A further question that Cannon does not address is whether this dismembering of black women's bodies results in a kind of disability. In *The Disabled God*, Nancy Eiesland places the needs and experiences of disabled people at the center of her "liberatory theology of disability."[44] Following Eiesland, Elizabeth Stuart asserts that blackness is not a disability. Clearly, from a medical perspective, having a dark skin tone does not fall into the same category as being physically or mentally handicapped. However, Eiesland defines disability broadly, not distinguishing between disability and disfigurement. Thus, she can identify the resurrected Jesus, who carries the marks of his crucifixion in his body, as "the disabled God." If the wounds in Jesus's resurrected body render him disabled, then the extensive scars on Sethe's back also render her disabled. And if this is the case, Sethe's skin color may indeed function as a disability when the slave master uses it to legitimate torturing her. Sethe's wounds call into question Stuart's assertion that blackness is not itself a disability. When a person is discriminated against because of one of her body's natural, healthy attributes, the line between disability and health blurs. If a body is punished for being what it is, does the aspect for which it is punished become a disability, along with the marks of that torture? If Jesus' scars render him disabled, then Sethe's scars, inflicted on her because of her color, also blur the line between disability and wholeness.

Only black women can say whether they experience their color as a disability. Yet Cannon and other authors indicate that many black women struggle to experience their color as positive. Color is not usually thought of as a disability, yet U.S. society discriminates against people with darker skin. In fact, Eiesland describes how the minority-group model has been useful to the disability rights movement, implying a parallel with the civil rights movement.[45] Through racism and colorism, black people have experienced severe discrimination because of their skin color. In the United States, black skin is marked. Resisting the urge to impose our own interpretations and listening to what African American women say if they direct their own vision to reading their bodies as texts will help us understand better what the past means today.

Class

These three issues—colorism and pigmentocracy, black women's status as women, and the inscribing of black women's bodies as texts—represent "Katie's Canon," the main issues Cannon sees as central to womanist scholarship. Her critique of class as a factor in U.S. society provides context for these issues. European Americans often deny the reality of class divisions. Clinging to a belief in the American dream, we think anyone who works hard enough can make it, that "everyone can pull herself or himself up by bootstraps whether they own boots or not."[46] Cannon reminds us that this is nonsense. The differences among those who begin from a position of privilege and those who do not are not usually the result of personal achievements or failings; instead, research shows that "the class position of one's family is probably the single most significant determinant of future success, quite apart from intelligence, determination, or hard work."[47] Yet dominant U.S. society treats varying degrees of success as though they are caused by each person's hard work or lack thereof. This protects the experience of the wealthy and privileged as the norm, strengthening the belief that if some do not have this experience, it is their own fault.

U.S. society's willful ignorance of class not only makes it difficult for people of lower socioeconomic status to participate fully in society, but can also keep them from recognizing that they are oppressed in terms of class. To raise awareness of this, Cannon quantifies and clarifies the factors that contribute to class status and how they may shift. Class shift is possible, but it can take three generations because people in the lower classes learn to "look up and blame down. They've been taught to covet what the higher social strata have without mining the mother lode on which they stand."[48] Black women trapped by the illusion of the classless society cannot use their own heritage to understand, question, and change their situations.

African American women experience discrimination at the intersection of sex, race, and class. Physical attributes and practices having to do with the body, including "physiognomy, pigmentocracy, dental care, nutrition, mortuary practices, and skeletal distinctions," are intimately related to class status.[49] If we take it seriously, Cannon's exposure of these connections can show European Americans how our color also determines our destiny. In socioeconomic discrimination, as in racial discrimination, we are not innocent.

Black Churches

In explaining the contemporary moral situation of African American women, Cannon critiques black women's situation in the black church. She traces the portrayal of women in black preaching, which revolves around biblical interpretation, back to its beginning in slavery. While commending this tradition's outstanding qualities, she challenges its tendency to "characterize African American women as 'sin-bringing Eve,' 'wilderness-whimpering Hagar,' 'henpecking Jezebel,' 'whoring Gomer,' 'prostituting Mary Magdalene,' and 'conspiring Sapphira.' "[50] These stereotypes damage black women's self-esteem. Attitudes toward women may be changing in the black church, but black preaching also tends to ignore black women's experiences, which are not identical with black men's. Further, the black women's literary tradition contains valuable sermonic material. No one could make use of this material better than black women pastors, but they are scarce. Cannon herself was the first black woman ordained in the Presbyterian Church, but she wound up in academia because no pulpit was open to her.[51] More black female pastors are needed for women's concerns to become mainstream in black preaching.

Womanist scholars and ministers are working to change the fact that black women remain second-class citizens in the black churches. They have long protested sexism in the black churches as well as black male theologians' blindness to this issue. Black theologians have begun to respond; for example, James Cone acknowledged the sexism in his book *A Black Theology of Liberation* (1970) with great embarrassment, and Dwight Hopkins began a book on black theology with womanist theology.[52] Although these problems are ongoing, the black churches are necessarily central in womanist thought. Theologically trained African American women are working with laywomen to alleviate gender discrimination in black churches as a misguided imitation of white patriarchy and sexism.[53]

Not only in society in general, but even in black churches, African American women still struggle for voice and recognition. Putting on the corrective lenses of black women's insights can help European Americans to see this situation plainly.

Seeing What Is There in Theology

Why does this situation persist? Cannon's theological study has confirmed the dissonance she has always felt between her church community's insistence on the universal parenthood of God and the discrimination she suffers as a black woman in U.S. society.[54] She exposes the trajectory of slavery, segregation, and racism as sinful and heretical in light of the Christian teaching that all human persons are made in God's image. In particular, conventional Christian theology and ethics have alienated black women by failing to account for black women's experiences. Cannon's theology, therefore, is driven by a two-part question: what are the theological decisions that have resulted in black women's alienation, and how can a Christian ethic useful for black women be developed? In developing such an ethic, Cannon mounts a major critique of Christian ethics while keeping the image of God as central. By seeing these realities clearly and acting accordingly, black female bodies image God.

African American women do not exercise their clarity of vision only in social or ecclesial situations. They also need it when they enter the academy as scholars of Christianity. Cannon traces this struggle back to the experience of Phillis Wheatley, a young black woman who endured a bizarre examination in Boston in 1772 to determine whether she could reason well enough to read and write. She passed the test, and African American women's right to write dates to it. But U.S. society is just beginning to treat black women as serious intellectuals and scholars. If nothing else, black women's struggle for recognition in the academy ought to convince European American theologians that change is needed.

African American women hold few positions of social power, including in publishing, and people in power typically neither understand nor appreciate African American women's work. Pointedly, Cannon asks, "In this context, how can African American women scholars receive the kind of critical, constructive feedback we deserve, if members of editorial boards know nothing about the subject matter, regard the subject as being of little scholarly value, and/or read our work as 'too political'?"[55] She recalls her efforts, as one of the first African American women studying graduate-level theology, to write an acceptable paper on Jesus's agony in Gethsemane. Her white professor, enraged at her ability to make him feel emotion, insisted she rewrite the paper until it was completely devoid of feeling. To prove herself as an intellectual, Cannon had to temporarily abandon her culture and family, sacrificing her race and gender to fit into the white academy: "I bleached and neutered myself so that I could write inert, dense, oblique prose from the neck up."[56] This narrow standard of what counts as academically rigorous may change with the advent of black women's scholarship.

In her critique of conventional Christian ethics, Cannon points out that because white Christian ethicists have usually ignored black women's experiences, they cannot truthfully assert that the ethical systems and norms they have constructed are universally applicable.[57] As a black female Christian ethicist, Cannon experiences tension between being accepted as "one of the canonical boys," a status she has earned with her education, and being a womanist. She exposes a fundamental discontinuity between the normative ethical tradition and the lived experiences of black people, particularly women. Like Mary Prince, she demands that black women's agency and experiences be taken on their own merits rather than assessed according to white standards.

In particular, Cannon disputes the dominant ethical tradition's presumption that the person who is seeking to act morally is always free to choose from among various options and that the most virtuous choices are those made without regard to potential or actual consequences. The chief example here is Immanuel Kant's contention that telling the truth is always the right thing to do, regardless of the circumstances. In this way of thinking, ethical decisions are made in a vacuum, for ethical rules are based on abstract judgments about what kind of behavior is virtuous. Cannon points out that in the United States, white people can affirm this sort of principle because they can generally expect to be rewarded for telling the truth and punished for lying. But black women cannot expect to be rewarded for "good" behavior. Black women's moral situation continues to be circumscribed by racism, classism, and sexism, among other factors, and this limits the choices they can make if they are to survive.

Cannon observes that although white ethicists sometimes notice a difference in the ethical situations of black and white people, they have often concluded that this difference means that black people's ethical standards are not moral; instead they are immoral or amoral. Cannon rejects this assessment.[58] Under slavery, segregation, and racism, people of African descent have not had perfect freedom or a wide range of choices. Therefore, black people may exercise moral agency in ways that appear contrary to traditional ethics. But while black moral agency may not look like white moral agency, it is nonetheless moral. Its central value is survival. To clarify this claim, Cannon critiques the usual white understandings of the meaning of frugality, truthfulness, and suffering and shows how a black perspective on each of these "virtues" may differ.

First, frugality and other characteristics allegedly related to economic success are considered virtues by European Americans because we assume that everyone who works hard enough can "get ahead."[59] This assumption is inherently flawed. Many people who work hard do not "get ahead"; and systemic racism prevents people of color from advancing at the same rate as European Americans, regardless of how hard they work. Frugality's status as a major virtue is based on privileged white people's experiences of its benefits. Black people's experiences are vastly different. The lower economic status of many African Americans does not result from a genetic inability to stick to budgets, but from structural inequalities. It is regularly reported, for example, that people of color pay consistently higher interest rates on their mortgages than white people with similar incomes and credit ratings. Given this reality, African Americans see right through the notion that being economical and diligent is all it takes to amass wealth. For European Americans willing to engage in critical analysis of our own experiences, events such as the 2008 economic meltdown and its aftermath could help to dispel this illusion.

Second, white people usually expect to be rewarded for telling the truth. But Cannon confirms that when black people tell the truth to white people, they are often punished. Remembering Mary Prince's story of the enslaved boy whose foot was bayoneted because he disclosed the antics of his master's son, compare Cannon's much more recent description of a typical scenario she faced as a teenager working as a domestic in a white home:

> I was asked by the white kids that I tended to, who were sometimes my age and sometimes older, for advice. (My confusion was always about the injustice of why, if we were the same age, I was their caretaker.) They would sometimes ask me what I thought about washing their hair with beer and other white folk phenomena. Learning, knowing, and remembering my place was critical to my job security. If I responded "What in the hell do I care?" or any milder version of that feeling, I would have been written off as uppity and therefore disrespectful, and fired. If I dumbed up and numbed out, ignoring them completely, just continuing my menial, low-paying work, such silence would have been read either the same way or as reinforcing my so-called inferiority and ignorance. It really was that precarious situation my mama describes: when you have your head in the lion's mouth, you have to treat the lion very gently.[60]

If Cannon wanted to remain employed—and employable—by whites, she could not respond to such questions with disdain or disinterest, either of which might have given a truthful indication of her opinion. Because she is black, Cannon's authentic response—telling the truth about her opinions and feelings—would have been punished with severe consequences. To retain her job, she had to show false enthusiasm for subjects that held no relevance to her life. Her decision to lie was therefore not a "free" choice in the sense that all options were open to her as they might be to, say, a white teenager, who could respond to such a question with indifference without fearing repercussion. In other words, Cannon was not free to act with what the white normative ethical tradition would call truthfulness. To protect her job, she must lie and lie convincingly. And this was a moral act. Much more was at stake than simple truth-telling; Cannon's welfare and that of her family depended on her savvy response. Thus, while truth-telling is highly valued in the black community, in oppressive situations, it can take a backseat to survival.

Third, conventional Christian ethicists commonly consider suffering a choice to be made by the free moral agent. These thinkers sometimes assume that people can choose the extent to which they want to suffer in order to learn from that experience. However, Cannon reminds us, “This is not so for Blacks. For the masses of Black people, suffering is the normal state of affairs.”[61] Because their agency is circumscribed by racism, sexism, and classism, black women cannot choose not to suffer. Their suffering is not the result of their own choices, but of a society hostile toward them because of their ancestry. To the extent that conventional ethicists consider suffering to be voluntary, they will continue to assume that black people suffer by choice, and they will fail to see that this suffering results from unjust oppression—oppression they are helping to perpetuate by advocating totalizing ethical systems.

Apparent differences in black and white enactments of “virtues” such as frugality, truthfulness, and suffering have led white ethicists to negate black moral agency. But Cannon argues that oppressive circumstances require a different kind of moral reasoning, the “epistemology of the oppressed.” For example, the teenaged Cannon could not respond to her employers as though she were perfectly free; she knew the consequences of her actions, and they dictated what her decision must be. Affirming the white community’s weird obsessions, she acted with integrity. In the survival struggle, then, deception is sometimes virtuous. Racism has necessitated reactive and protective moral codes, a theological clarity that privileged white ethicists lack. Perhaps Christian ethicists working contextually out of other racial or ethnic groups would also describe “alternative” value hierarchies of response to white racist supremacy.

African American women creatively struggle for survival in a hostile society, so their moral agency cannot be judged by privileged European standards. Given black women’s alienation from conventional Christian ethics, Cannon calls for “a fundamental reconceptualization of all ethics with Black women’s experiences at center stage.”[62] She proposes an ethics relevant to black women’s moral situation; although critiquing white Christianity, she also reclaims what is life-giving. Advocating for black preaching that addresses women’s concerns and creates a contemporary ethical framework that can carry black women’s experiences, Cannon maintains the image of God as central. Her ethics, first outlined in *Black Womanist Ethics*, draws upon black women’s literature and experiences, especially the life and work of Zora Neale Hurston, a writer who lived from 1891 to 1960. As a result, it looks quite different from conventional ethics. She identifies three traits of an ethical black woman: from Hurston’s life, invisible dignity; from her fiction, quiet grace; and from her nonfiction, unshouted courage.[63] Black women exercise these virtues in upholding the central value: survival.

Invisible dignity means that the black woman maintains her integrity in the face of tremendous oppression and hardship. As is typical for black women, Hurston's childhood was characterized by lost innocence. During her early years in an all-black town with her father as mayor, her family was somewhat insulated from white society. Her parents worked hard, each in their own way, to prepare her to survive in the world she would eventually encounter. Hurston's mother died when Hurston was nine years old. Learning independence in a hostile society, Hurston transformed her "lost innocence into invisible dignity."[64] Cannon describes this moral accomplishment as *invisible* because white society and even the black community did not recognize it as a virtue. Maintaining her integrity and commitment to her work through the most demoralizing circumstances, Hurston refused to see her life as totally defined by racism. Despite the humiliations she endured—she had to accept grant money from white patrons who set rigid parameters for her writing, which was misunderstood even by black authors—she retained her sense of self, her faith in the goodness of black people, and her joy in life. Her fiction portrayed black people as they lived among themselves; her characters' existence was much broader than their reactions to the oppression of white society, and they retained a certain feistiness regardless of circumstances.[65] Only a direct attack, in which the black community falsely accused Hurston of molesting a young boy, finally succeeded in breaking her spirit. Cannon upholds Hurston's life of invisible dignity as an example for black women because it shows "not only how to survive but also how to prevail with integrity against the cruel systems of triple oppression."[66]

Quiet grace means that black women persist in searching for truth despite the obstacles. As "invisible" describes the hiddenness of their dignity, "quiet" indicates "the invisibility of their moral character."[67] They cannot be passive in the face of oppression. Quiet grace is the ability

> to decipher the various sounds in the larger world, to hold in check the nightmare figures of terror, to fight for basic freedoms against the sadistic law enforcement agencies in her community, to resist the temptation to capitulate to the demands of the status quo, to find meaning in the most despotic circumstances and to create something where

> nothing was before. Most of the time this is done without the mumble of a single word, without an eruptive cry to the hierarchical systems that oppress her.[68]

Quietly graceful black women seek truth with integrity. The protagonist of Hurston's best-known novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, provides a worthy example. Janie's grandmother wants material security for her granddaughter and tries to achieve it by marrying her to a wealthy but unlovable man. For Cannon, Nanny's courageous action "was the quiet grace of slavewomen, but Janie yearned for something more."[69] Janie desires not material possessions but the freedom to give and receive in relationship. The novel chronicles her search for this fulfillment, which she finally finds with a man much younger than herself. Janie's persistence in seeking happiness despite the judgments of society and her own community is quiet grace as truth.

The third moral quality is *unshouted courage*. Once again, the adjective indicates that the world does not recognize black women's courage, "the quality of steadfastness, akin to fortitude, in the face of formidable oppression."[70] In conventional ethics, courage can refer only to freely chosen actions. Since black people, especially black women, do not have pure freedom, they exercise courage differently.[71] Cannon's unshouted courage resembles Paul Tillich's definition of courage as the moral determination to uphold the dignity of the self in the face of opposition.[72] No one can do this alone; this particular kind of courage is always found in community. It is the communal will to survive, and ultimately, its aim is to uphold human worth.

With invisible dignity, quiet grace, and unshouted courage as central virtues in her womanist ethics, Cannon draws upon the theologies of two twentieth-century theologians and civil rights activists, Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King, Jr., to present the image of God as central to the lives of black women. For Thurman and King, the image of God applies to all human persons and legitimates black people's struggle for equality.[73] Thurman holds that for oppressed people, ethical action begins with a personal encounter with God and the realization that one is created in God's image. King draws on natural law to insist that every person is made in God's image and deserves respect as such. The image of God thus provides the theological basis for black people's struggle for survival. In applying their clarity of vision to settle on moral actions that are appropriate to their situations, black women image God.

As a child, Cannon felt the discord between the beliefs of her family and church and the laws of the United States. Her community taught her that all people are children of God, but the law forbade black and white people to occupy the same spaces.[74] Now the laws have changed, but U.S. society still favors white people. The doctrine of the image of God and the statement that all are created equal show that this is a systemic evil, yet simply recognizing this does not correct it. Black people, especially women, still need clear vision and survival ethics, and white people need to understand our role in this reality in order to see how far we still have to go before we can truly claim to support the equality of all people.

Combat Breathing as Imaging God

Easy prosperity is the American dream, but in reality it comes only to a privileged few. The ways in which it is denied to the many have evolved over time, but the denial remains constant. It is so pervasive, so toxic, that African Americans need an alternative ethical system in order to survive. African Americans see this with a clarity that most European Americans lack; Katie Cannon's carefully chosen adjectives—*invisible*, *quiet*, and *unshouted*—indicate that dominant U.S. society has failed to appreciate black women's high moral standards. Black women's identity as human, as image of God, makes their own and their community's survival a virtue, an ethical imperative. By exercising moral agency, black women honor their own human dignity as human beings made in the image of God.

When African American poet and playwright Ntozake Shange explains her notion of "combat breath," she refers to the writing of Frantz Fanon, who is known for analyzing the effects of French colonialism on the peoples whose countries were colonized.[75] Having considered slavery, segregation, and racism in chapter 2 and in this chapter, we can see that Fanon's description needs but slight modification to articulate the effects of this trajectory on people of African descent, people like Mary Prince and Katie Cannon:

> French colonialism [racial discrimination] has settled itself in the very center of the Algerian [African American] individual and has undertaken a sustained work of cleanup, of expulsion of self, of rationally pursued mutilation.
>
> There is not occupation [control] of territory [bodies], on the one hand, and independence of persons [minds] on the other. It is the

> country [person] as a whole, its history, its daily pulsation that are contested, disfigured, in the hope of a final destruction. Under these conditions, the individual's breathing is an observed, an occupied breathing. It is a combat breathing.[76]

The individual who practices combat breathing is aware that her physical, mental, and emotional existence is largely circumscribed by someone else's will and that she is struggling—often invisibly—to free herself. Her breathing is her lifeline, her spirit, her resistance. Cannon's work reveals that "combat breathing" remains an apt (though not exhaustive) description of the situation of African American women today in society, church, and academy.

In contrast, European Americans tend to believe that our nation offers equal hope and promise to all. Ours is not combat breathing. It is easy and uncomplicated. Our vision, like Thomas Cobb's, is carefully delimited, revealing only what we want to see; and many of us see slavery as a distant memory, a regrettable mistake ended long ago. If we listen to Cannon, however, we realize that the effects of slavery are alive and well, that our society is not the welcoming, friendly place to everyone that is to us, and that we hold some power to change these things. Cannon shows us that we should begin to honor bodies that appear "other" than our own by questioning our assumptions and giving priority to the knowledge of those who see more clearly than we do. We must admit that we do not know and believe what others say. Once we accept that they are telling the truth about their experiences, our understanding of them and ourselves begins to change. The cost of our new vision is our cherished belief in our own and our ancestors' innocence. But we cannot ignore the suffering of millions of our fellow human beings. If we claim to love truth and justice and peace, we cannot afford to manufacture our own reality, as Cobb did. If we are the lion Katie Cannon's mama described, we ought to know it.

Social and ecclesial attitudes toward black bodies cause black women to wrestle with negative feelings about themselves. Cannon's personal experiences provide a poignant example.[77] Because of her darker skin, her aunt rejected her and her sister used to call her an "old black dog."[78] Trying to prove herself in school, she discovered that lighter-skinned children got the best roles in plays, teachers hid darker-skinned children when white people visited the school, and though she was the smartest student she was never valedictorian. In college she thought her lighter-skinned lab partner must be more intelligent than she. Cannon describes her female body as an enemy that has worked against her since adolescence. She has resisted her own attractiveness, knowing it would impede her success as a scholar. Blackness has always been central to Cannon's self-consciousness; she was so used to defending her blackness that being questioned on account of her femaleness was a shock when it occurred in graduate school. While she often confronts white racism, she knows black people also discriminate against her for her color.[79] She has to exercise her particular clarity of vision even within her own community.

Cannon identifies strongly and culturally as black, but she has a hard time seeing herself as beautiful. This is not surprising given U.S. society's ambiguity toward black women's bodies. The 2007 incident in which Don Imus, a talk show host, referred to Rutgers University's female basketball players as "nappy-headed hos" is a graphic example. Contextualizing this remark in the history of race relations, Zine Magubane observes, "For African-American women, the personal has always been political. What grows out of our head can mean the difference between being a citizen and being a subject; being enslaved or free; alive or dead."[80] Although standards of beauty are problematic for all women, Cannon's struggle has been affected by how her color functions in others' expectations of her and her attitude toward herself. Cannon now seems to embrace her color as positive, but surely it would have been better if, throughout her life, the people around her—aunt, sister, teachers—had seen her, encouraged her to see herself, as dark and beautiful rather than as dark and ugly. Being able to identify her body and its specific characteristics as the image of God might have prompted such a vision. It might at least have prevented Cannon from having to exercise combat breathing in relation to herself.

Building community among black women is key to this struggle for self-affirmation. For example, Cannon describes how much better she feels in Philadelphia health clubs, working out with other full-figured black women, than she does in Cambridge, Massachusetts, exercising next to women so thin they resemble adolescent boys.[81] These connections are essential for black women to trust the value of their own experiences for the wider community, black church, and society. The first task of womanist scholars, therefore, is to bring to light the heritage, traditions, and wisdom of their foremothers so black women can develop sisterhood and encourage one another. White women, and white people in general, should not try to insinuate ourselves into this process before we are invited. In the meantime, we can educate ourselves about our own history and present reality, taking the responsibility to correct our own vision.

In her more revealing moments, Cannon yearns to throw away the hair straighteners and skin lighteners and reject the ideal of the anorexic white supermodel, for herself and for all black women. This affirmation of her body, including her color, as part of her human identity as image of God, is not only for herself or for black women but for everyone. Bodies are not the problem; the problem is racism, colorism, sexism. We all need to embrace ourselves, including our bodies, as fully human and wholly beautiful. Christians—particularly white Christians—must transform our vision to acknowledge skin color as a part of how each person is uniquely made in God's image. To honor black women's struggle to survive and to join them in it is not only to recognize God's image in black women, it is also to honor that image in ourselves.

5

Surrogacy and Survival: Delores S. Williams

Motherhood is fraught with expectations and stereotypes in the United States. Despite the positive historical association of strong nurturing abilities with black mothers, contemporary U.S. society and culture often vilifies African American women; movies, television, and music portray them as wantonly sexual. For example, national discussion about welfare policy has been highly racialized.[1] Although more white families depend on welfare than black families, and the number of black teenagers on welfare is tiny, the stereotypical welfare mother has long been an irresponsible black teenager. Media coverage of welfare has declined and become less racialized in recent years, but it remains true that "when white Americans think about welfare, they are likely to think about black Americans."[2] Given the widespread negative stereotypes about welfare, this tendency reinforces negative stereotypes of black women. The assumption that poverty and laziness go together endures. White culture considers middle-class or wealthy women who stay home to raise children to be heroic, yet poor mothers who exercise this option, willingly or otherwise, risk being labeled lazy or worse, especially if they happen to be black. So much rhetoric swirls around black mothers that the reality that most are devoted, loving, hardworking parents—bearing responsibilities similar to and at least as weighty as those of most white mothers—can be obscured from white view.

What is it like to be a black mother in a white society? As a white mother, I can scarcely begin to imagine what it would be like to have to teach my child to cope with daily aggressions large and small; to fight for my child's access to educational opportunities that are simply handed to other children; to fear constantly that my child will be the victim of senseless violence, whether verbal or physical; and all

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the while to have my parenting misunderstood and denigrated by the very society made more prosperous by my efforts. The black feminist poet Audre Lorde, addressing white women, sums up this experiential gap: "Some problems we share as women, some we do not. You fear your children will grow up to join the patriarchy and testify against you, we fear our children will be dragged from a car and shot down in the street, and you will turn your backs upon the reasons they are dying."[3]

Most white women in the United States are socialized to expect that, if we so choose, we will one day be part of a nuclear family—wife, husband, and children—and that the children we raise will be biologically ours. For various sociohistorical reasons, black women have not always expected this, nor has it been obvious that being part of an exclusive nuclear family would serve them or their children best. Black women's modes of parenting certainly include blood mothering (parenting one's biological children), but also prevalent are relationships of othermothering and fictive kin (caring for children not one's own), as well as the public roles of church mothers and community mothers. White people's ignorance of these important forms of motherhood has contributed to our negative stereotyping of black mothers. Given the gulf between black and white understandings and valuations of motherhood, can any European American, even a mother, ever fully understand what motherhood has meant for African American women? I suspect we cannot, but I think we can learn something by trying.

Womanist theologian and Presbyterian lay preacher Delores S. Williams's writings, especially her book *Sisters in the Wilderness*, contain reflections on the question of the theological significance of black motherhood. In particular, Williams critiques the surrogacy expectations under which black women have suffered, and she celebrates all forms of mothering in which black women engage as enabling the race to survive. This chapter sets Williams's ideas about black motherhood in dialogue with various thinkers to consider their implications for theological anthropology. My goal is to begin to discover the ways in which European American Christians can understand and learn from the struggles of black women to be good mothers. I attempt not to compare social rhetoric about black and white mothers, but to consider what motherhood means "on the ground." By inquiring into what it means to be a black mother in a white society, we may become able to see something we have not seen before about the meaning of being a white mother in a white society.

Surrogacy Oppression in the United States

In the biblical story of Hagar and Sarah,[4] a slave woman gives birth to a child in place of the master's barren wife. When Hagar escapes to the desert before the child's birth, the Lord sends her back to her master's house. Years later, a jealous Sarah banishes Hagar and her child permanently to the wilderness, where they make a home for themselves. For Williams, this ancient surrogacy tale epitomizes the oppression African American women have long experienced. While all women of color in the United States are vulnerable to tripartite oppression based on race, gender, and class, surrogacy is the particular, even unique "structure of domination" black women face.[5] Williams deploys the idea of surrogacy to describe a destructive force that continuously infects black women's experiences, manifesting differently in diverse periods of U.S. history.

Historical and Contemporary Surrogacy Experiences

Contemporary surrogacy attitudes are rooted in the unfreedom that, as Katie Cannon has shown, circumscribed all enslaved women's experiences. Reflecting on this history, Delores Williams emphasizes that people of European descent exploited enslaved women by forcing them to perform tasks that rightly belonged to others. These "coerced surrogacy" roles included serving as a mammy or nurturer, which involved the most responsibility and sometimes led to a semblance of respect from white people; working as a field laborer, wherein black women were seen by whites as able to carry a "man's load"; and being sexually available to white and black men alike, as black women were forced to provide sexual pleasure for white men and to "breed" future slaves for the masters' economic advantage. While the last role was most dehumanizing, coerced surrogacy was a uniquely black female experience in all three.[6]

Some of these indignities lessened at the end of the Civil War, when, Williams notes, surrogacy became "voluntary." In particular, expectations that black women would perform fieldwork and be sexually available to white men diminished greatly. The latter was still often assumed despite the new legal status afforded to marriage between black women and men, but at least the law now afforded women the right to refuse.[7] Yet they still faced great pressure to choose surrogate roles. In particular, both white and black people saw being a "mammy" as positive. Some scholars doubt that the idealized "mammy," as portrayed in movies like Victor Fleming's *Gone*

10.1057/9780230114715 - Racism and the Image of God, Karen Teel

with the Wind, ever existed in real life.[8] But the role was purposefully perpetuated after slavery; one man even founded a "Black Mammy Institute." Though black women were no longer obligated to choose surrogacy, society still urged them to do so.

How do surrogacy attitudes affect black women today? Although social expectations of surrogacy as a particular obstacle to black women's flourishing may appear more obvious—at least to European Americans—when they involve domestic labor, nurturing, or fieldwork, they are by no means obsolete. We could consider various trends here: employment expectations such as welfare-to-work programs that have sent the message that poor black women are more valuable—or less dangerous?—to society in minimum-wage jobs than at home with their children (labor surrogacy); the hypersexualized portrayal of black women in music and movies (sexual surrogacy); the assumption that black women are by nature wise, motherly figures (nurturing surrogacy). Williams provides a focus for our reflections when she asks whether U.S. society is now coming full circle with reproductive surrogacy, in which wealthy white people can once again rely on black women to carry and birth their babies. The word "breeder" has even been used to describe surrogate mothers.[9] Williams worries that women of color may be exploited because African Americans represent a disproportionate percentage of America's poor, so that black women will be more likely to need the money they can earn by performing this service. We should take Williams's concern seriously, not just as a caution against exploiting women of color, but also as an opportunity to examine contemporary instances of surrogacy. In doing so, we may come to understand more about ourselves as white Americans.

As Williams surmised in 1993, contemporary U.S. surrogacy seems to be an issue more of class than of race. No statistics exist to confirm this, as regulation of surrogacy relationships varies from state to state and no single institution brokers or publishes data on such relationships. But while it may be mostly economic concerns that push women into surrogacy, contested cases appearing in the media are often highly if subtly racialized.[10] Some black women suffer far worse in surrogacy relationships than the financial exploitation Williams feared of providing a dangerous and intrusive service for relatively little money. To give one example, the 1990 dispute *Johnson v. Calvert* concerned a black surrogate, Anna Johnson, who gave birth to a baby for a couple who were white (Mark Calvert) and Filipina (Crispina Calvert). Johnson sued for custody, claiming that although she was not genetically related to the baby, carrying and birthing him had established an authentic bond. During the trial, the media consistently vilified Johnson with all the usual stereotypes of black women. Among other things, the Calverts' lawyers contended that Johnson wanted the baby not because she loved him but because she was so "enthralled" with whiteness that she wanted a white child. (They conveniently ignored the fact that the child was half Filipino.) One judge argued that Johnson's claim to be the child's mother was valid and that the child could in a real sense be said to have two mothers, but the court ultimately ruled that the couple's genetic link with the child was more significant than Johnson's relationship of gestation and birth. The Calverts won custody.

As the lawyers' arguments about "whiteness" show, the rhetoric around this case was not limited to genetics but was highly racialized. The Calverts emphasized that the light-skinned baby "looked like them" and not like Johnson, and the media consistently presented this as a compelling reason for the couple to receive custody. This obsession with race as determining "likeness" appears widespread among European Americans. Susan Markens's study of media coverage of infertile parents who seek out surrogacy relationships reveals that aspiring white parents sometimes turn to surrogacy because too few healthy white infants are available for adoption, and they prefer surrogacy to adopting a child of a nonwhite racial background. One prospective white father's explanation for choosing surrogacy conflates health and whiteness in an especially telling fashion: "It may sound selfish, but I want to father a child on my own behalf, leave my own legacy. And I want a healthy baby. And there just aren't any available. They're either retarded or they're minorities, black, Hispanic... That may be fine for some people, but we just don't think we could handle it."[11] When reminded that the baby born through the surrogacy arrangement could have a birth defect, this man says he would accept such a child because he or she would still be "his." In other words, rather than to adopt a healthy child of another race, this man prefers to bring into the world a white child who might be disabled. Such comments should prompt European Americans to consider the possible convergence of racism and disability prejudice, as the previous chapter suggested in another context.

Though this particular story was reported in 1980, we would be naïve to think that such attitudes have been eradicated. Setting aside the question of adoption by people of color, the typical selection process of white adoptive parents still reveals a clear hierarchy: white babies are chosen first, followed by Hispanic and Asian babies, then African American babies. Not coincidentally, the order corresponds with the increasing perceived difficulty a person of each group will have if trying to "pass" for white.

Why is racial likeness so important for whites in the United States? Avoidance of transracial adoption may sometimes be explained by the wish to enable the child to avoid being recognized as an adoptee by "passing" as a biological child, or the desire to let children grow up with members of their own culture, whatever that means. In some cases, particularly for LGBT people barred by law from adopting due to their sexual orientation, surrogacy may be the only possible route to parenthood. White people's reasons for choosing surrogacy over adoption are complex and varied and cannot be untangled easily, if at all. But our history must condition us to be vigilant for the likelihood that such apparently benevolent desires mask less noble motives. The point here is not to suggest that all forms of surrogacy should be abandoned in favor of adoption; indeed, insofar as adoption is a necessary social practice of hospitality to parentless children, we must guard against placing the entire burden of this responsibility on those struggling with infertility.[12] But to the extent that European Americans tend to view surrogacy as a reasonable and even preferable alternative, this should alert us to ferret out any racist dimensions of our prejudice against adoption.

Beyond reproductive surrogacy, further questions also call attention to black women's contemporary social-role surrogacy. For example, aborted fetal tissue has research potential for curing diseases similar to that of embryonic stem cells. It is currently a felony in some states to sell human body parts, including fetuses, and at least one thinker has argued that this law should be nationalized because women of color, who are more likely than white women to be poor, face a disproportionate likelihood of exploitation if the sale of fetuses should be permitted.[13] Thus, the question of whether to make fetal tissue alienable—allowed to be sold for profit—raises concerns about the commodification of black women's bodies. Legal scholar Dorothy Roberts contextualizes such debates over black women's reproductive capacities by describing their historical development. For her, such questions put mothers and unborn children in conflict in a way that recalls the image of the punishment of the pregnant slave: "Slaveholders forced women to lie face down in a depression in the ground while they were whipped." This enabled the slaveholder to punish the woman while protecting the fetus, who would increase his profits.[14] The ways in which black women are exploited in U.S. society today may appear less shocking, but African American women's vulnerability to manipulative surrogacy is by no means obsolete.

Taking the argument further, Williams states that the United States has always had a genocidal impulse toward African Americans—if not always manifested physically, then culturally, mentally, and spiritually. Linking Hagar's story to strategies of survival and resistance not only in black churches but also in contemporary U.S. society, she traces the long history of a negative attitude toward all things black in U.S. society, finding its roots in England and the English people's sense of their own superiority and "civility" over the rest of the world.[15] Lending credence to Williams's argument from a social science perspective, Kenneth Neubeck and Noel Cazenave characterize the welfare reforms of the 1990s, especially interest in Norplant and family caps, as a means of race population control targeted primarily at African Americans.[16]

Williams's concern with black people's survival and resistance struggle in contemporary U.S. society also leads her to sociopolitical issues such as eugenics. She shows that Christianity and Judaism have used eugenics—the "science" supposedly proving that black people were biologically and morally inferior to white people—to deny the human dignity of black people, just as they have done to other people classified as nonwhite. "Preachers, rabbis and their congregations participated in communicating these ideas to their constituencies," and "many Protestant sermons claimed the Bible was a eugenics book."[17] Eugenics still lurks in some corners of the United States; for example, Maryland legalized the abortion of a fetus at any stage of pregnancy if a birth defect was found.[18] Further, some lawmakers favor using birth control in the black population to decrease poverty among African Americans, though they do not promote this "solution" among European Americans. Williams wonders whether, by extension, black skin could be labeled a birth defect and used as a reason to abort.[19] Likewise, Dorothy Roberts raises the concern that assistive reproductive technologies result in "positive eugenics—increasing the number of babies from superior parents."[20]

Indeed, in 2006, a couple sued a fertility clinic for fertilizing the wife's egg with the wrong man's sperm. The resulting healthy child's skin is darker than either parent's. The couple, Nancy and Thomas Andrews, who are Hispanic and white, respectively, not only brought a malpractice suit against the clinic but also claimed mental distress caused by having a child who is "not even the same race" as they are.

They even sought damages for the hardship their daughter will face as someone who appears African American in this society. Echoing the Calverts almost two decades later, the Andrews's lawyer said, "Jessica doesn't look like them."[21] Yet legal expert and commentator Patricia Williams, examining an Andrews family photo, observes that Jessica closely resembles her mother and elder sister; if anything, it is the pale father who appears "different." She concludes, "In an era when none of us are slaves but all of us are increasingly objects in the marketplace, it is sad and alarming that 'Negro' features, however arbitrarily perceived or shiftily delineated, still lower the value of the human product, of human grace."[22]

These disturbing trends render it necessary for black women to engage survival and resistance skills as they navigate American society and sometimes even their own homes and churches.[23] Williams cites examples of resistance during slavery: escaping, fighting back by poisoning masters or killing their own children (to save them from slavery), and helping other black people escape and rebel.[24] She also outlines contemporary strategies by which black people can protect their communities: keeping alive the memory of black (s)heroes from the civil rights and other eras; creating a can-do attitude among black people regarding banking, education, and other social institutions; and supporting critical constructive thought rather than emotionalism in black churches.[25] Williams calls these activities "lifeline politics" or "survival intelligence." Resembling Katie Cannon's "epistemological privilege of the oppressed," this means resisting the assaults upon black women's reproductive and nurturing capacities, their self-esteem, and their right to relationship. Black women resist with various "political strategies": by acquiring the physical strength to fight back, by bonding with other women, and by distancing themselves (escaping) from their oppressors.[26] Ultimately, these "lifeline politics are…religious in nature…supported by women's religious practices."[27]

Surrogacy expectations continue to plague black women today. In the attempt to assimilate into white society, black families have often imitated the patriarchal structure of white nuclear families. This generated still-lingering negative stereotypes of black women as fat, asexual, and concerned more for children than for themselves. Such stereotypes pose a problem for Christian theologians who want to do constructive theology based on black women's bodies.[28] Even as we seek to honor the struggles and triumphs of black mothers, we must avoid glossing over or attributing false glamour to the pain and suffering they experience. Heeding this caution is vital as we inquire into the theological implications of black motherhood.

Surrogacy: A Theological Critique

Williams herself attends carefully to this danger as she uses black women's surrogacy experiences to critique the common Western Christian understanding of the Atonement, the idea that Jesus died in our place and his suffering is what redeems us.[29] She avers that this construal of Jesus's torture and death wrongly glorifies surrogacy. Surrogacy is especially problematic for black women because, in the United States, white and black Christian ministers have invoked it to claim that black women should suffer in silence, seeing their pain too as redemptive. Distrusting this scapegoat version of salvation and identifying Jesus's death on the cross as murder and "defilement," Williams declares, "The cross only represents historical evil trying to defeat good."[30] She counsels black women to reject the notion that Jesus saves as a surrogate. Instead, Jesus's life, ministry, and resurrection are salvific: Jesus saves by teaching us to live in right relationship with one another.[31] Referencing Jesus's words and actions in the gospels, Williams summarizes, "Jesus did not come to redeem humans by showing them God's 'love' manifested in the death of God's innocent child on a cross erected by cruel, imperialistic, patriarchal power. Rather…the spirit of God in Jesus came to show humans *life*—to show redemption through a perfect *ministerial* vision of righting relations between body (individual and community), mind (of humans and of tradition) and spirit."[32] Black women who wish to follow Christ should imitate his life and ministry, not his suffering on the cross.

Many theologians agree with Williams that nothing good comes from violence.[33] Yet not all accept her provocative assertion that Jesus's suffering should be completely disconnected from the salvation narrative. If "suffering is the normal state of affairs" for black people, as Katie Cannon says,[34] then it seems only natural to seek some meaning in the fact that Jesus suffered too. James Cone argues that we must remember Jesus's unjust execution for its resemblance to the lynchings of many black victims in the United States.[35] Going further, Joanne Marie Terrell makes a womanist attempt to retrieve a constructive meaning of the cross in black experience.[36] She struggles to remember Jesus's suffering in a way that neither glorifies violence nor erases its memory. She agrees with Williams that the cross does not contain God's sanction of violence, but insists that the cross is a sacrifice in that, in Jesus's pain, God suffers with us. Terrell does not want to lose this insight, so central to many black women's spirituality, because she believes knowing God has suffered too can encourage black women to love and value themselves.

Responding to Williams from a Korean perspective, Hee An Choi compares African American women's surrogacy experiences with Korean women's surrogacy experiences as "comfort women" for Japanese soldiers during World War II and as sexual workers for American soldiers until the present.[37] Implying that the experience of surrogacy may indeed be unique to African American women within the United States but that the distinction may not hold in a global context, Choi argues that Korean women have also endured both coerced and voluntary surrogacy. And although she agrees with Williams that Jesus's surrogate role should not be *glorified*, she asserts that Jesus's suffering should nevertheless be *remembered* and *honored*.[38] In this way, Choi condemns the role of surrogate while opening up a space for women's surrogate experiences to be remembered with respect. She makes it possible to acknowledge that it would have been better had Korean women not experienced these traumas, yet also to enable Korean women not to live in shame and secrecy, hiding their past and present. The care with which Terrell and Choi must proceed shows how difficult it is for Christians to construct a theology that honors the experiences of victims without glorifying suffering itself.

Latin American Catholic liberation theologian Jon Sobrino offers a perspective that is perhaps most compatible with Williams's original proposal.[39] Like Williams, Sobrino sees Jesus's crucifixion as an unmitigated disaster wrought by human sinfulness. He reads Jesus' resurrection as a confirmation of the value of Jesus's life and the tragedy of his death: the resurrection is God's declaration that Jesus's murder should never have happened. Therefore, the meaning of the resurrection for all who are threatened with tragic death is that God opposes their suffering; for those who do not face this risk, it means that the only sure way to follow Jesus is by working to eliminate it in solidarity with those who do face it. Though apparently uninfluenced by Williams, Sobrino's approach is basically consistent with her primary concern—not to glorify surrogacy—while also leaving space to attend to the suffering of Jesus and, by extension, of the poor as an experience to be honored precisely by active resistance.

Since black women have often functioned as surrogate mothers, this question of surrogacy and suffering remains important. During slavery, enslaved women frequently gave birth to their masters' children, and all of the children who were biologically their own were legally their owners'. They also raised children orphaned by sale or death. Othermothering and fictive-kin relationships continue this tradition in contemporary society. Black women have consistently embraced black children, making a way out of no way. Williams celebrates these achievements of black women, whose mothering and othermothering enables the race to survive.

In Williams's analysis, surviving surrogacy is positive, but surrogacy itself is destructive: "Surrogacy has been a negative force in African-American women's lives. It has been used by both men and women of the ruling class, as well as by some black men, to keep black women in the service of other people's needs and goals."[40] It is a death-dealing phenomenon that has aimed to prevent black women from resisting oppression. Moreover, while it has clear psychological and spiritual ramifications, surrogacy is a concrete body experience, both because surrogate roles often require physical labor and pain and because black women would not be burdened with them if their skin were not black.

Resistance and Survival

African American women's history of resistance to dehumanizing surrogacy oppression, especially under slavery, is well documented; likewise, much has been said about black motherhood. But little of this reflection has been done by black women themselves, and black men and white people tend to distort black motherhood, whether by devaluing it or romanticizing it. In *Black Feminist Thought*, sociologist Patricia Hill Collins argues convincingly that black women need to begin articulating their own views on what it means to be a mother.[41] Delores Williams also calls for a theological revaluation of oppressed black motherhood. Cautioning us to remember that not all black women are or want to be mothers, and that this detracts nothing from their blackness or their womanhood, Williams nevertheless insists that if theology cannot take black motherhood seriously, then it cannot liberate black women.[42] Such analyses provide an indispensable part of the foundation for a theological anthropology that takes black women's bodies seriously. This constructive work, however, must be done by black women themselves. In what follows, therefore, I summarize some initial forays into motherhood by black female scholars as the backdrop for considering Williams's theology of survival.

Reconsidering Black Motherhood

Collins identifies five trends in the history of black motherhood that can serve to interpret black motherhood: blood mothers, othermothers, and women-centered networks; mothers, daughters, and socialization for survival; community othermothers and political activism; motherhood as a symbol of power; and the personal meaning of mothering.[43] Each trend is historically verifiable in U.S. society, but the extent to which all five still apply is debatable.[44] With this multivalent presentation of black motherhood, Collins shows that mothering can be a source of power for black women but can also tie them down and limit their creativity; it is a font not only of joy and love but also of terrible pain and sorrow. Though not all African American women are mothers, these experiences provide an invaluable window into understanding what it is like to be a black woman in the United States.

Reconsidering black motherhood opens up a space to consider black fatherhood as well. Williams indicates that if some black fathers are uninvolved with their children, this is not because they are inherently inadequate as parents, but rather because their parental identity has been stolen from them. She leaves open the possibility that African Americans could develop a tradition of otherfathers and community fathering modeled on the long history of community mothering.[45] Similarly, Cheryl Townsend Gilkes argues that strong community mothering is not based on the absence or weakness of fathers; rather, it is rooted in African cultures in which women have traditionally wielded certain forms of social power.[46] In the United States, black women's othermothering—caring for children not biologically one's own—turns the dehumanizing forces of coerced and voluntary surrogacy on their heads, using surrogacy as a way to prosper amid oppression. With this "female networking," women have survived and children have thrived.[47] It is not simply the task of the biological mother to care for the children she births; rather, all in the community must care for all of the children. Alice Walker suggests that "motherhood as a role of caretaker for children must become a community role shared by males and females."[48] The black community should strive not to approximate the nuclear family prized by whites, but to preserve the othermother role and expand it to include men.

Gilkes argues that at least partly due to African family traditions, black women have never sat by and accepted secondary roles in church or community.[49] Strong black mothers are respected and always find

10.1057/9780230114715 - Racism and the Image of God, Karen Teel

ways to contribute and lead. Gilkes traces this to African traditions of women's culture that were not subordinate to men's; though women cared for children, this did not mean they could not do many things men did. In the United States, the Church Mother is a central figure in black churches, commanding deep respect and profoundly influencing church policy from her seat in the front pew.[50] Though black men have been ambivalent about women's leadership, black women have never passively accepted subordinate roles.

Moreover, for black women, motherhood and community activism may be fundamentally connected. According to Gilkes's analysis, black mothers draw, often unconsciously, on the great social and political power that was wielded by women in West African societies. She points out that since black women often hold important, if untitled, leadership roles in their churches and households, black churches and families have not entirely yielded to European patriarchal norms.[51] When it is used to describe black female activists, the very name "community mother" highlights the connection between black women's commitment to motherhood and their dynamic commitment to survival and wholeness in their broader communities. While we need much more work on the meaning of black motherhood, this at least provides a starting point for understanding Williams's theological analysis of motherhood as a means of survival.

A Theology of Survival

Who is God for the oppressed in history? Liberation theologians usually answer that God actively works for justice and liberation, now. But Williams notices that when Hagar tries to liberate herself by escaping to the desert, God sends her back to slavery in Abraham's house. Prioritizing Hagar's survival over her liberation does not mean that she and her descendants will never be free, but they must wait a little longer.[52] Hagar survives surrogacy, and, unlike Anna Johnson, she ultimately achieves "custody" of her child. Her story contains the promise of future liberation for her descendants: they will become a great nation. Thus, in contrast with black theologians such as James Cone and novelists like Richard Wright and James Baldwin, who focus on liberation from white racism, Williams does not believe God always interacts with the African American community in ways that lead directly to liberation. In *Sisters in the Wilderness*, Williams consciously constructs not a *liberation* theology but a *survivalist* theology.[53] With God's help, Hagar and African American women have survived and resisted their surrogacy experiences, though they have not always been liberated from them.

Black women's survival/quality-of-life struggle has been central in black history.[54] In particular, without black mothers' reproductive and nurturing abilities, the race would not have survived to be liberated—survival is critical to liberation, but the two do not always occur together. Yet black and white thinkers alike have seriously misunderstood black motherhood. White people have disrespected black women's humanity, considering them to be animals, breeders, or, at best, nurturing but asexual mammies; and black thinkers have accused black women of focusing on motherhood to the exclusion of liberation.[55] Black churches have perpetuated the mammy stereotype and denied women the opportunity to preach, while male blues artists and protest writers have accused black women of weakness, thinking that women turn to religion to fill a void in their lives that black men leave empty.[56] But black women's faith has enabled them to survive when liberation is impossible.

Williams believes that black male thinkers, in particular, misunderstand black women's modes of resistance because they miss this subtler theme of "survival intelligence,"[57] without which liberation would be impossible. Misreading black motherhood, black thinkers have confused the liberation struggle with the survival/quality-of-life struggle. Historically, black women worked for black survival by caring for each other's children, both during slavery when they could be punished for doing so and after the Civil War, when some would travel for their work, which was sometimes preaching. Without romanticizing motherhood or implying that all real black women are mothers, Williams asserts that motherhood has been a central and often positive experience for black women, whose nurturing has profoundly shaped the community. Indeed, black spirituals from slavery time portray mothering and mothers as helpful and caring, and black women's robust faith in a God who helps them to make a way out of no way gives them the strength to nurture their own children and the entire community.[58] In this approach, parental love is not limited to one's "own" children but offered to all. Black children have flourished under this system.

While black women's accomplishments should not be underestimated, Gilkes joins Williams in cautioning us that

> the misperception that black women have succeeded against all the odds masks the realities of single parenting, joblessness, and poverty

> that create unparalleled stress in the lives of black women. In spite of the agency that black women have exercised to construct a culture that resists the destructions of racial oppression, the problems that create crises in their lives and the conflicts that emerge when black women seek to take their rightful places of leadership still stand as what Du Bois called "mighty causes" requiring attention and action.[59]

We must guard against glorifying black women's successes to the extent that we miss the need for structural change. Keeping this important caveat in mind, it is instructive that black women authors, especially Alice Walker, portray black women's struggle for survival and journey toward a healthy view of God in a positive light. Expanding on the survivalist vision derived from Hagar, Williams notes that in *The Color Purple*, the protagonist Celie must get rid of her image of God as an old white man and see that "God is inside her and inside everybody else." Once she does, her relationship with God helps her to make sense out of her own experiences and create a life for herself. Celie does not strike out alone on her journey of self-discovery; her friend Shug is a vital companion and guide. Celie's survival/quality-of-life struggle takes place in community with other black women, and the concerns of motherhood play a central role.[60]

Pushing past Williams's observation that God does not always liberate immediately, Renee Harrison insists that even if that is true, God does intend black women's thriving. She argues that since Hagar is never liberated and does not even thrive, her story cannot be satisfying for black women.[61] Black women's God must want for them not only survival but also flourishing. If Hagar's story leads black women to accept survival as good enough, then they should exercise a "hermeneutic of rejection" toward that particular biblical story and risk a "hermeneutic of re-appropriation" toward *The Color Purple*, which has also achieved canonical status among them. Celie, who initially simply survives her stepfather's and husband's assaults, eventually achieves a new existence where she thrives in community with her fellow human beings. Although, in contrast with Williams, Harrison implies that this is a story of liberation,[62] she also points out that "Shug, *in the midst of her oppression*, notices the color purple" and that "*in the midst of her oppression*, [Celie's] life is full."[63]

While black and feminist theologians typically imply that flourishing is impossible without liberation, womanists Harrison and Williams remind us that total liberation is an ideal, unlikely to be actualized. Nevertheless, they insist that it is possible to prosper (Williams's term) or thrive (Harrison's) in the midst of oppression: black women flourish in the struggle. Williams would probably object to Harrison's affirmation of a positive side to surrogacy; where Harrison names Nettie's role as surrogate mother to Celie's children "healthy," Williams might respond that this role would have been unnecessary if the children had not been taken from Celie in the first place. But Williams would certainly affirm Nettie's othermothering as valuable survival activity. In any event, Williams and Harrison remind us that oppressed people not only survive but also prosper and thrive, even without total liberation. To paraphrase Alice Walker, we all need to scrape the whites off our eyeballs to be able to see that being black is a source of enduring joys and blessings despite—and sometimes unrelated to—our hostile white society.[64]

Black Motherhood as Imaging God

How can these realities and this theology of survival illuminate the image of God in African American women? Intimately related to Williams's survivalist theology and her understanding of motherhood, the African American idea of wilderness has evolved over time. It has often functioned positively for African Americans, especially during slavery; physical location was very important to the enslaved black person, who temporarily freed herself from oppression when she escaped to the wilderness. Upon emancipation, her location was suddenly up to her, and in a hostile society, wilderness gained a new, negative meaning. The notion of wilderness helps to frame what we may learn from Williams about black motherhood as the image of God, though she herself seldom uses this term.

Critiquing and retrieving Williams's idea of wilderness as a theological category, Emily Holmes summarizes Williams's account of the development in African American understanding of wilderness in these two phases.[65] First, for enslaved people, God was not found primarily on the plantation but in uncultivated places where the master had no power. Wilderness was the location in which one could meet God. This positive idea of wilderness directly contradicted the conventional white understanding of wilderness as a frightening, dangerous place that must be tamed. Holmes emphasizes that in this original African American understanding of wilderness, the body was extremely significant, for it was precisely in physically entering the wilderness and engaging one's senses that one met God. To show this idea of wilderness at work, Holmes evokes the clearing scene from

Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, in which Baby Suggs directs newly freed black people to practice loving their bodies by dancing and singing, laughing and crying, loving each of their body parts in turn.

Second, after the Civil War, the meaning of "wilderness" largely ceased to indicate a physical location and grew to mean a social and temporal location in struggle in the "wide, wide world." Wilderness came to mean the hostile society in which black people found themselves, and God was there to help them in the struggle. Williams claims that the "symbolic sense of wilderness held together what the community took to be women's positive body experience (pregnancy, motherhood, nurturehood), the slave's positive religious experience in the antebellum wilderness (which involved the body) and the community's experience as an ethnic body in the free world of postbellum America."[66] Thus, this idea of wilderness creatively connects several aspects of black experience, both positive and negative. Holmes urges womanists not to let this symbol lose its multivalence and allow "wilderness" to have only a negative connotation, for this would not only limit God's presence to negative experiences, but also lose the importance of the body as the central medium through which God can be met.[67]

For Williams, however, human bodies are more than a medium of encounter: they are sites of the incarnation. Williams insists that incarnation first began when "the Spirit mounted Mary." The incarnation happens in multiple bodies: first in Mary's body when she becomes pregnant with God; then in Jesus's own body; then spilling out into the life of the church, so that the incarnation can happen in any body.[68] Williams explains, "Incarnation, in a womanist understanding of it in the Christian testament, can be regarded as a continuum of the manifestation of divine spirit beginning with Mary, becoming an abundance in Jesus and later overflowing into the life of the church."[69] This overflowing continues today in black mothers who survive and flourish in spite of their oppression. In short, for Williams, Jesus is not the only instance of incarnation in human history. Filled with the survivalist spirit of God, oppressed black mothers also become sites of the incarnation.[70]

Though Williams herself does not do so explicitly, Holmes links Williams's theological idea of wilderness with her discussion of incarnation.[71] Holmes argues that Williams's creative attention to multiple meanings of wilderness, especially as the place where God may be met, corresponds with insisting that the incarnation is not limited to Jesus's body, but happens in multiple bodies. More than seeing the body as a medium through which God may be met, the body plays a role in redemption. Bodies are not simply means to meeting God, but contain and manifest God's own life.

In drawing out implications of these ideas, Meghan Sweeney proposes that Williams's theological anthropology has a divine core.[72] Williams's anthropology is rooted in Jesus and, more important, the Spirit as concrete manifestations of God's love in the world, realities that emerge into the world in and through human bodies. Incarnation is not a once-and-for-all event limited to Jesus; rather, Jesus's life-giving ministry calls forth the incarnation of the Spirit in many persons. Sweeney argues that Williams's anthropology is more pneumatological than Christological; in other words, incarnation is primarily incarnation of the Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, whose activity in human history is ongoing, rather than of the Word (Logos), the second person of the Trinity, who is often traditionally understood to have become incarnate in only one person.[73] The divine can and does become present in multiple bodies.

Williams's connection of incarnation to particular bodies—to oppressed black mothers—takes on special significance in light of our question about bodies and the image of God. If black women's bodies can literally be sites of the incarnation, then such bodies are concrete manifestations of the spirit of God. The divine spirit takes flesh from the flourishing of creation-as-wilderness and particularly from the bodies of oppressed human persons, part of creation and sites of the incarnation. It is important to remember that in claiming oppressed black motherhood as a site of the incarnation, Williams is not claiming that all black women manifest the incarnation simply by virtue of their experiences of surrogacy. Rather, the spirit of God resides within those who resist oppression by whatever means are available to them. It is particularly visible in those who survive and flourish despite adversity.

If oppressed black mothers manifest the incarnation, then they can certainly be said to image God. Indeed, with Williams's expansion of the incarnation to include more bodies than Jesus's, the distinction between incarnation and image begins to collapse. If black women's resistance and survival activity literally bears the incarnation of God, then image language becomes superfluous. Williams's intriguing proposal deserves further consideration. However, she is not prepared to claim—and neither am I—that every human person manifests the incarnation. For the time being, because I am seeking resources for affirming that everyone has the image of God and that bodies themselves can signal that image, I shall preserve the distinction between incarnation and image. Maintaining the traditional assertion that the image of God is something every person *has*, simply by virtue of being human, I can affirm that it is not only the oppressed black mother who images God, but all black mothers, indeed every human being. More than this, and perhaps more important, Williams's argument about the saving power of Jesus's ministry, her insistence that incarnation occurs in multiple bodies, and her focus on survival activity, all illuminate an essential point: the image of God is something that at least some people *do*. Thus, we can say that every person carries the image, but perhaps not everyone successfully enacts that image.[74] Fighting for survival and flourishing despite adversity, then, are concrete ways in which oppressed black mothers live out the image of God.

Williams's vision has far more clout in demanding the affirmation of the inherent goodness of human bodies than, for example, Ian McFarland's, which distinguishes not only between Jesus as the incarnation and the rest of us as merely human, but also between Jesus as the proper image of God and the rest of us as merely mirroring or imitating that image.[75] McFarland's schema, of course, has its biblical roots in Paul. Here Williams's preference for the Christological resources of the synoptic gospels, specifically their ministerial vision of Jesus's saving activity,[76] makes a crucial difference.

Survival and resistance are bodily experiences, and so is motherhood. While surrogacy is death-dealing, surviving and resisting it affirms the goodness of life, not simply life in general but the concrete lives of particular human bodies. Whether or not we accept Williams's expansive notion of incarnation and the intriguing possibilities it engenders, her insight makes it possible, even imperative, to affirm that when black women practice self-care, when they nurture children over against a hostile society, when they protect black bodies, minds, and spirits from white assault—that is, when they work for black survival—they image God. Black women image God not in being oppressed but in their response to oppression, not by being forced to be surrogates but by resisting, surviving, and flourishing in spite of it.

White Journey to the Wilderness

Delores Williams's work shows that black motherhood can be a profound way of imaging God. As black testimony suggests, forms of motherhood such as othermothering are not merely responses to the negative impact of slavery, such that African Americans would be better off had they not been needed. Rather, they are a gift, representing not pathologies but models from which white families would do well to learn. This is especially true when, as has happened among black mothers, caring for children leads to community activism.

At great personal cost, black mothers—blood mothers, othermothers, fictive kin—have enabled the black community to survive. This achievement should be celebrated as a triumph of the human spirit, a particularly "American" success story. Yet because it has often contrasted with the ideal of the private nuclear family that is still held up by and for European American mothers (regardless of whether that ideal has ever been actualized), and because it has been achieved over against the often hostile forces of whiteness, African American motherhood has been ignored and disparaged by European Americans.[77] To us, the despairs and triumphs of black motherhood have been invisible in plain sight.

White U.S. Christians have not only failed to notice black female bodies' enactment of the image of God, we have also actively sought to thwart it. In considering Delores Williams's theology of surrogacy, wilderness, and incarnation as calling attention to God's image in African American women's bodies, we European Americans can comprehend our role in altering wilderness by inflicting surrogacy expectations on black women. It was our forerunners' actions that created wilderness as a wide, hostile world, and it is our racism—personal and systemic—that perpetuates it. Williams's account of surrogacy oppression emphasizes the fact that black women's ways of imaging God are not abstract: their survival activity includes escaping from us to meet God in the wilderness and protecting themselves and their own from our aggression. Our death-dealing actions and attitudes have called forth an imaging of God that takes shape as self-defense against us. Insofar as God is present in this reality, European Americans can be sure that God defends people who are oppressed not against some impersonal racist force, but against us.

Wilderness as hostile world not only hinders black people from embracing the positive sense of wilderness as a location where they meet God in their bodies, it also prevents white people from understanding our own actions and from embracing wilderness, or unfamiliar territory, as life-giving. As society grows more and more dependent on technology, the older African American notion of wilderness may remind us to see bodies not as a dangerous unknown to be tamed or a trivial aspect of being human, but as a precious place that must be respected and preserved.[78] Perhaps all of us can remember how—or learn—to meet God in our bodies.

As European Americans allow this womanist vision to transform our vision of ourselves, seeking out the wilderness as a place in which to meet God, our own initial wilderness experiences will be neither comfortable nor comforting. We will be moved to examine ourselves and our history, to face up to the sins of white supremacy, to confront the suffering in the faces we have dismissed as "not like us." We will find, as James Cone warned decades ago, that God loves us wrathfully, with a will to destroy our whiteness.[79] Only thus may we begin to understand how our actions thwart black women's flourishing. With hard work, we may become able to claim these sins, to mourn and repent. If we undertake this journey, we may train our eyes to see the ways in which we still perpetuate the negative sense of wilderness in society. It is even possible that we may begin to understand how to stop.

In recognizing black motherhood as a rich, complex, difficult endeavor, we see that white supremacy never completely defines black women's lives. European Americans can learn to rejoice in victories over injustice that are not our own, even victories that represent our own defeats. We can never know everything about the lives of those we have oppressed. But if we find the courage to undertake our own journey into the wilderness, we may become better able to understand our own role in the suffering of people of color. If we can do that, perhaps we can learn to respect all human bodies, particularly bodies who are oppressed, as the image of God, in whose resistance and survival activity God appears on earth and in whom we may meet God.

What does it mean to be a white mother in a white racist society? These reflections on Delores Williams's work generate a few initial observations. It means being able to ignore the plight of many children of color and our role in perpetuating it. It means not having to train our children to survive random racist assaults. It means not having to see all children of our race as our own in order for our race to survive. And, at least for those of us who are heterosexual, it means being respected for our parenting efforts regardless of whether we are partnered or working outside the home. Many mothers in the United States, including white mothers, do not have these advantages.

Paying attention to our neighbors and inquiring into our attitudes about them teaches us a lot about ourselves. White parents should not necessarily copy othermothering and fictive-kin structures, but we must expand our vision of effective parenting to include them. And when we notice that we too rely on social networks to help raise our children, whether paid or unpaid—parents switching off, care by extended family and friends, trading child care with other parents, babysitting and day care, public and private school—we may gain greater insight into our own parenting practices and compassion for people whose parenting we perceive as "different." In turn, this awareness might prompt us to advocate for improved public education as well as social programs such as welfare, health care, and state-sponsored child care. In honoring the failures and successes of black motherhood, white people may begin to accept the responsibility to transform ourselves and, in solidarity with our neighbors, the society we all share.

10.1057/9780230114715 - Racism and the Image of God, Karen Teel

6

The Color of Christianity: Kelly Brown Douglas

Whether from personal experience or film and television portrayals, most European Americans know that Sunday services in black Christian churches can be quite lively. Adorned with elegant and colorful garments, worshipers dance, clap, wave, shout, sigh, and sing. Choirs, accompanied by drums, brass, and keyboards, repeatedly build to emotional climax, carrying the people along with them. Pastors call out to the people, exhorting them to enthusiastic response. African American Christians celebrate, lament, pray, and praise the Lord with their bodies.

In contrast, in many white Christian churches, worshipers comport their conservatively attired bodies solemnly. Musicians, rarely swept away by feeling, virtually solo as the people sing in muted tones, if at all. People murmur responses sotto voce; pastors appear unconcerned with the quality of congregational participation. European American Christians carefully control their bodies in order to appear properly decorous before the Lord and one another.

On the surface, African American worship customs appear to indicate a level of comfort with the body that far exceeds that of most white Christian practices. Yet many of these churches—white and black alike—exhibit a tendency to fear and condemn sexual diversity. Homophobia and heterosexism are common among Christians, and black and white churches are at the forefront of the movement to block same-sex marriage. Among U.S. citizens, African Americans are particularly likely to oppose same-sex marriage, often citing Christian teachings as their reason.[1] Such attitudes reveal a deep-seated aversion to certain kinds of bodies. But given the history of U.S. racism,

10.1057/9780230114715 - Racism and the Image of God, Karen Teel

of white aversion to black bodies, should black Christians oppose homosexuality?

So far, African Americans have reached no consensus. Some see same-sex marriage as a civil rights issue for which black people should advocate; others, citing the Bible as hostile to same-sex relationships, take offense at the suggestion that because enslaved black people were forbidden to marry, and subsequently were forbidden to marry whites, they should now support same-sex marriage. Black religious scholars also disagree among themselves. In the late 1980s, toward the beginning of the development of womanist theology, Cheryl Sanders argued that Christian thinkers could not be womanists because same-sex relationships, which Alice Walker's foundational definition of the term affirms, are contrary to the spirit of Christianity; she has been contradicted by Katie Cannon and Monica Coleman, among others.[2] The dispute over homosexuality among black Christians constitutes a microcosm of the wider debate.

Some African American religious scholars argue that black opposition to homosexuality is an unfortunate byproduct of assimilation, trying to fit in with white culture. Black worship services may be lively, occurring as they do in a space somewhat protected from the white gaze. But in order for black denominations and churchgoers to be accepted as authentically Christian, the content of preaching largely conforms to the white mainstream. Arguing that black churches have uncritically adopted homophobia from white churches, womanist thinker Kelly Brown Douglas asserts that this is a matter not only of biblical interpretation but also of the theological development of Christianity. In her view, the primary culprit is the influence of Plato and the Greeks that led to "platonization," the inscribing of dualism at the heart of Christianity. Douglas believes that extracting platonization from the black faith tradition and replacing it with a concept of "harmonious relationality" could eradicate black Christian homophobia.

How would this work? And should white Christians pursue a similar corrective for our faith tradition? To consider these questions, this chapter first outlines Douglas's investigation of how Christianity became platonized, with special attention to the effect this has had on black bodies; second, it examines Douglas's proposal to rectify this problem through an emphasis on harmonious relationality and a sexual discourse of resistance; third, it asks how white Christians should respond to this account. If, as Douglas argues, platonization has had a special affinity with the white faith tradition, can white Christianity be redeemed? What color is Christianity?

10.1057/9780230114715 - Racism and the Image of God, Karen Teel

The Platonization of Christianity

White identity in the United States evolved over time, pitting Caucasians against everyone else.[3] Douglas asserts that from this noxious root, planted in the ancient soil of platonization, grew white culture, characterized by imperialism, self-centeredness, and greed. Sexuality is a central arena in which white culture has imposed its will; for Douglas, white cultural negativity is grounded in the degradation of black sexuality.[4] This violent assault "has not only impeded Black people's ability to embrace themselves," she asserts, it "also has interfered with their ability to know God."[5] Clarifying the effect this has had on African Americans, Douglas investigates theologically the possibility of reversing it.

"Black Homophobia Mimics White Culture"

One extremely harmful effect of these attacks is that black people have been unable to discuss their sexuality, even among themselves, to challenge misperceptions. Douglas points out that the very attempt seems to confirm the white notion that African Americans are obsessed with sex.[6] Traci West concurs: "Fears about stoking [white] racist images can halt any effort to openly engage in critical dialogue about sexuality and spirituality in black churches."[7] While Douglas and West call this lack of critical dialogue a silence, Victor Anderson points out that black churches engage in plenty of overt discussion of sexuality.[8] But it centers around what West calls "heterosexual normativity," emphasizing heterosexual marriage and the sinfulness of acting on any other sexual orientation. These scholars agree that most black churches do not exhibit a healthy sexual ethic.

This lack is particularly problematic when it fosters heterosexism and homophobia, and it has been deadly regarding HIV/AIDS, about which denial and misinformation are common.[9] Douglas is not the only scholar to note that in condemning homosexuality, sometimes labeling HIV/AIDS as God's judgment on sinners, black Christian churches fail to respond to the crisis adequately.[10] Douglas asserts that black Christians have uncritically and wrongly adopted homophobia from conservative white Christians. Ironically, by fostering divisions within black communities, black "homophobia mimics White culture in the way it destroys Black lives."[11] Black scholars attest that this can be at least partly explained as an attempt to gain "respectability" among whites. But any attitude that causes black people to turn on one another—especially when it contributes to the spread of a deadly disease—requires careful scrutiny, particularly when Christian teachings trigger the conflict.

Increasingly, African American religious scholars criticize heterosexism and homophobia in black churches. Coleman decries the black churches' attempts to respond to HIV/AIDS without frank discussions of sexuality.[12] She reports that black LGBT Christians cope with hostility in their churches by "filtering out" antigay messages, "passing" for straight, and departing for more welcoming congregations, if they can find them. And, as "colorism" represents the African American community's internalization of discrimination based on skin color, Coleman notes that black gays and lesbians sometimes internalize homophobia and discriminate against each other, for example by excluding one another from ministry. Likewise, though noting a few gay-friendly church initiatives, Anthony Pinn judges the black church's denunciation of homosexuality to be "its most counterproductive stance," hardly softened by the "love the sinner, hate the sin" approach adopted by many.[13]

While these scholars call on black Christians to reject white demonization of black sexuality, particularly homosexuality, and to engage in open and accepting discussions about sexual differences, such discussions remain mostly in the future. West reports the words of Irene Monroe, a black feminist Christian clergy activist, who sums up what will be possible when the silence is broken: "If we can find a way to talk about sexuality, we will be able to talk about wife abuse, about rape, about child abuse. We can talk more freely about the construction of black heterosexuality. We can talk about the way in which black bodies are constructed within this American context."[14]

Where to begin? Scripture gives no clear mandate on homosexuality, because the handful of passages that appear to discuss it can be interpreted in multiple ways. As Coleman observes, "The gospel of Jesus can inspire Christian communities that welcome gays and lesbians as well as those that do not."[15] Some black scholars, including Douglas, argue that it is disingenuous for black Christians to take literally the parts of the Bible that condemn homosexuality when they reject the passages that condone slavery.[16] Why, Douglas wonders, do so many churches, especially black churches with their history of civil rights struggle, choose heterosexism and homophobia over inclusion? And if, in doing so, black churches can act "white," that is, oppressive, then is Christianity truly good for black people or is it rotten at the core?

The Platonization of Christianity

In pursuit of an answer to this question, Douglas undertakes a theological investigation of Christianity's origins.[17] She identifies three principal themes that constitute Christianity's theological core: Christianity affirms a closed monotheism, it professes a Christological paradox, and it foregrounds a crucifying cross. Arguing that, early in Christianity, through a terrible but not inevitable progression, each of these themes became corrupted by the body-soul dualism that can be traced back to the influence of Plato and the stoics, Douglas laments the fact that Christianity became "platonized."

By *closed monotheism*, Douglas means that, like Judaism, Christianity teaches that its god is not only the highest and most powerful god, but also the only god.[18] Christians have commonly believed that they possess the truth and can therefore judge the veracity of other beliefs. This insistence appears to build upon Plato's notion that absolute truth is knowable and is more real than the material world. In Christianity's early days and beyond, worshiping other gods was not simply considered inferior to worshiping the Christian God, it was seen as idolatry that offended the Christian God. Although this belief is not inherently oppressive, it is an easy step from judging other beliefs to be false to actively disrespecting the people who hold them. This step was quickly taken: once Christianity gained the powerful backing of the emperor Constantine in the early fourth century, Christians began persecuting non-Christians. They stopped the worship of "false" gods by destroying not only the gods, but also, if necessary, the people who worshiped them. Though Christians had themselves recently endured such suffering, they reasoned that the one and only God commanded them to punish idolaters. For Douglas, insofar as it has encouraged persecution of non-Christians, closed monotheism has been a serious problem. Much later in history, European Christians' abject failure to respect Africans' religious traditions was a factor in their willingness to enslave these people.

Christological paradox refers to the understanding of the Incarnation as established at the early councils, culminating with Chalcedon.[19] The Chalcedonian formulation declares that Jesus is both God and human. As such, he has both a human and a divine nature, each of which retains its integrity. Exactly how these natures work together remains a mystery, or paradox. This idea is not inherently problematic; the church fathers, although drawing heavily on Greek concepts, did not fall into platonic dualism, declaring that the human nature was inferior to or overpowered by the divine nature.

Unfortunately, despite the care they took to preserve this "ontological paradox," and despite the inclusive ministry of Jesus as reported in the Gospels, or "existential paradox," Christians have often understood the Incarnation in dualistic terms: to be divine is better than to be human; God is spirit; therefore, the human mind or spirit is superior to the body. This argument draws on Plato's privileging of the mental, rational, or spiritual over the material and on the stoic preference for reason over passion.

In this schema, difference means hierarchy, so applying it to human relationships also creates hierarchy, devaluing those who appear—literally—to be less rational.[20] Sexuality, objectified and cut off from human love and relationality, has most often been used as the "test case" for establishing this hierarchy. Christian persecutors have often justified their actions by appealing to sexual norms from which the persecuted supposedly deviate.[21] Conventional views of women offer the most obvious example: women, who can bear children, are closer to nature; men, more rational, are closer to God. When Europeans began to encounter Africans in the context of the slave trade, the same logic was applied. Concluding, based on their notions of modesty, that all Africans were hypersexualized, European men assigned Africans a place on the rationality scale even lower than European women. As chapter 2 described, they argued that enslaving Africans was good because they would be "Christianized," whereas if they stayed in Africa, their souls would be lost. Later the argument shifted: Africans should not be baptized, for one could not enslave a fellow Christian. Here, Douglas argues, closed monotheism and Hellenistic dualism interacted to deadly effect.

White denigration of black sexuality worsened once the Africans were under white control in the colonies. Even as slaveholders raped black women with impunity and forced frequent "breeding" among slaves, they rationalized their outrageous behavior by inventing myths about black people's sexuality: black women as "Jezebels" who might have copulated with apes in Africa; black men as sexually insatiable beasts from whom white women must be protected. None of this had any basis in fact, but the "rational" white people were unconcerned about that. Stressing the similarities between the *crucifying cross* of Jesus and the lynching of black people in the United States, Douglas emphasizes that "sexual misconduct was often given as an excuse for the lynching of black men."[22] Since Christians have commonly believed that Jesus's suffering on the cross was redemptive and may be imitated, they have felt entitled to persecute non-Christians without regret, as well as to persecute fellow Christians, insisting that the victims should accept their suffering because it makes them more like Jesus.[23]

By the phrase "platonized Christianity," then, Douglas designates not simply Hellenistic influence on Christianity but the way Christian thinkers synthesized Christianity's theological core with the mind-body dualism often traced back to Plato.[24] The urge to define difference that is present in closed monotheism and Christological paradox has rendered them susceptible to misuse, especially when combined with the idea of redemptive suffering, a common—though, she argues, wrong—interpretation of the crucifying cross at the center of Christianity.[25] Concurring with many scholars who attribute the soul-body dualism common among Christians to Greek mind-body dualism, Douglas demonstrates that these ideas coalesce in a theologically supported denigration of black bodies. Exploiting the vulnerabilities in these core Christian beliefs, power enables and encourages Christians to be persecutors.[26] Just as Christianity's closed monotheism combined with religious power to dehumanize non-Christians, platonized Christianity has enabled the denigration of nonwhite, nonmale bodies by framing difference as threatening and inferior. But since Jesus' own teachings demonstrate no disregard for differences among human bodies and sexualities, this was not inevitable.[27]

While Douglas demonstrates that platonization has contributed to white racist supremacy among European American Christians, she also shows that black Christians have embraced platonized Christianity, with mixed results. In the early years of the United States, the platonized tradition was strongest in the evangelical Protestant Christian South.[28] Emphasizing spiritual conversion and holy—that is, sexually repressed—living, the Great Awakenings were highly platonized. In this context, "conversion meant nothing less than turning away from the 'excesses' of the body, that is, lewd behavior, toward the virtues of the mind, that is, reason."[29] The fact that many black people converted to Christianity did not challenge white people's notion that black people were more passionate and therefore inferior.[30] Nevertheless, black converts adopted platonized views of human bodies. They drew a parallel between Jesus's redemptive suffering on the cross and sacrificing the racial/sexual self, striving to meet white social ideals by embracing what Douglas calls a "hyper-proper sexuality." Since attaining a "white" soul might overcome the "stain" of blackness, holiness came to denote racial and sexual self-rejection.[31] But it never worked. As Riggins Earl, Jr., explains, white Christians saw blackness as sinful and black people as twice fallen, first with Adam and again with Noah's Hamitic curse. Therefore, even though black people's souls might be redeemed—whitened, through washing in the blood of Jesus—their bodies never could.[32] These false ideals and hopes, Douglas asserts, led many African Americans to condemn those who did not embrace platonized sexuality, even when they were black, and to collude with patriarchy and heterosexism.[33]

Although the platonized tradition bestowed temporary survival benefits upon some black people, Douglas declares that "platonized theology is inherently heretical."[34] Dividing the soul from the body, it reduces the body to nothing more than a "cauldron of sexual activity." "Platonized theology and white cultural ideology come together with such a force in the lives of black people that together they generate a dedication to sexual propriety that becomes an almost impregnable denial of sexuality," a denial that prevents black people from forming healthy relationships.[35] Hyper-proper sexuality is no more an authentic expression of black sexuality than the Jezebel stereotype. Douglas concludes that "platonized theology is anathema to the black faith tradition": since heterosexism and homophobia are intimately connected with white hatred of blackness, black people must reject them.[36]

Reclaiming the Black Faith Tradition

Conceptually, it is relatively simple for Douglas to declare that platonization is incompatible with authentic Christianity and that a nonplatonized black faith tradition can be reclaimed.[37] But since platonization confers limited benefits on black Christians, actually extracting it from black faith will be difficult. Contending that the meaning of blackness must be expanded beyond racial identity to an active concern for the well-being of all black bodies, Douglas sets out to retrieve what she calls the "authentic black faith tradition." She stresses "harmonious relationality," which she identifies as a traditionally African value in direct conflict with the platonized strand of Christianity, as the core theme of this tradition.

To implement this idea, Douglas distinguishes between core and contingent Christian beliefs.[38] Core beliefs, such as the Trinity, are permanent and essential to the faith; contingent beliefs, such as condoning slavery, are culture dependent and may be changed. Contingent beliefs often masquerade as core beliefs; nevertheless, the distinction allows Douglas to declare that the authenticity of a contingent belief

10.1057/9780230114715 - Racism and the Image of God, Karen Teel

may be judged by whether it liberates and affirms the lives of black people. Given the destructive effects of conventional sexual attitudes on the black community, Douglas categorizes homophobia and heterosexism as contingent beliefs that must be abandoned. But it will take more than black Bible scholars arguing that the Bible is a culture-dependent document to convince many black Christians: they need to understand how heterosexism and homophobia have harmed them.

With time, patience, and dialogue, Douglas's liberating black Christ, who may be represented by anyone who works for black women's liberation, has the potential to reform not only problematic contingent beliefs but also the corrupted themes of Christianity's theological core.[39] First, the abuses of closed monotheism may be corrected by the black Christ, because he can appear in liberators who are not Christian. If nonbelievers can image Christ, clearly they are sacred. Second, the co-optation of Christological paradox into dualism can be confronted by careful attention to Jesus's incarnation, or the ontological paradox, and his liberative ministry, or the existential paradox. Third, practitioners of a spirituality of resistance and survival will certainly oppose the supposed value of redemptive suffering. Emphasizing the second and third possibilities, Douglas proposes harmonious relationality and a sexual discourse of resistance as theological and practical options for people whose humanity has been maligned by whiteness.

The paradox of the Incarnation, as defined at Chalcedon, is the real core of Christian belief about Jesus and, by extension, about human bodies. Jesus's body affirms the goodness of all human bodies. Since God became human, Christians must respect the body as "a receptacle for divine witness . . . an instrument for divine revelation."[40] All created aspects of human life, including bodiliness, are sacred.[41] Moreover, the Incarnation shows that to be human is to be in relationship with oneself, with other humans, with creation, and with God.[42] Because bodies are sexual, Jesus's body not only negates dualism but also mandates a positive view of sexuality. Liberation, then, must include not only black souls but also black bodies, including sexuality. Douglas states, "The message of God's embodiment in Jesus is unambiguous: the human body is not a cauldron of evil but, rather, an instrumentality for divine presence."[43] Only with a healthy understanding of sexuality can we enter into right relationship with one another and with God.

Unfortunately, no form of Christianity has yet lived up to this tradition. Platonized Christianity ignores the existential paradox—the radically mutual relationality and the resistance to abusive social/political power that characterize Jesus's ministry—because it could not be reconciled with the soul-body dualism that overtook the ontological paradox. Yet the existential paradox, important in all liberation theologies, is central to black Christian faith and to understanding the reign of God.[44] Jesus healed and protected human bodies; he never defiled them.[45] Taken seriously, this fact might have prevented Christianity from supporting "disreputable dehumanizing relationships that culminate in the defilement of human bodies."[46] Further, because of the existential paradox, Douglas believes that God opposed, rather than caused or accepted, Jesus's crucifixion.[47] Jesus's passion, death, and resurrection affirm the goodness of life, not of suffering. Like Delores Williams, Douglas holds that a view of atonement as redemptive suffering can have no place in an authentic Christian understanding, for it implies divine sanction of the oppression of black bodies.[48] The cross and resurrection reveal the sacredness of embodied human life, the revelatory privilege of victims, and the rightness of compassionate solidarity as a response to suffering. Since black people's tragic experiences, especially lynching, strikingly resemble Jesus's suffering and death, God must be their advocate. God takes the side of victims, not victimizers. Douglas concludes, "Jesus Christ makes clear the blasphemous nature of a Christian tradition that cultivates or sustains shameful treatment of any human body."[49] Harmonious relationality, then, is sought by affirming the equal dignity of all.

With a sexual discourse of resistance, Douglas hopes to reestablish the intimate "connection between sexuality and loving relationships."[50] In place of platonization and redemptive suffering, she affirms all bodies, especially black bodies, as good: "God's embodied presence in Jesus affirms the testimony of the first chapter of Genesis that all of God's creation was good, including the human body."[51] Specifically, diverse sexual orientations must be respected as natural and God-given; indeed, insofar as they promote loving respect, they should be encouraged.[52] Given the HIV/AIDS crisis, along with the debates over the rights of same-sex couples, Douglas's suggestion is significant for all Christians. She believes the Jesus of the Gospels would defend these oppressed ones today: "The ministry of Jesus, the incarnate one, clarifies that sinners are those who foster racism, sexism, and homophobia and those who nurture racist, sexist, and heterosexist structures and systems. For the church to be homophobic and heterosexist is for the church to be Antichrist."[53]

Douglas's black Christ not only endorses the black community but also critiques it where it falls short, as when it fosters sexism, heterosexism, and other oppressions of black people. A sexual discourse of resistance will "expose how the sexual politics of White culture, with its varied attacks on Black sexuality, has made it appear that homophobia is compatible with Black life and freedom, even though this is not so."[54] This spirituality of survival springs from black people's trust that Jesus is on their side. Because homophobia denigrates authentic human sexual expression, it can have no place in genuine Christian faith. Homosexuality, as a means of demonstrating agapic love, should be welcomed as a gift from God and an authentic exercise of sexuality.[55] Douglas believes that once black people understand that heterosexism, not homosexuality, is destroying their relationships, and that in acting homophobically they mimic white racists, they will reject homophobia.[56] New Testament scholar Abraham Smith concurs that applying a black sexual discourse of resistance to the Bible will ultimately eliminate homophobic texts from the black biblical canon.[57] Combating disembodied views of humanity and sexuality is a basic theological task of the black community, which is well suited to this work because it has long recognized God's concrete actions in its own history.[58]

Ultimately, the image of God provides theological grounding for both harmonious relationality and a sexual discourse of resistance. For Douglas, although every person is created in the image of God, not everyone manifests that image well.[59] To manifest the image of God means to practice agape: "an active love, the giving of oneself for the sake of justice and the building of an authentically human (loving) community."[60] This view of Jesus's ministry gives rise to a spirituality of survival and resistance. Appealing to the image of God present in every person, Douglas argues that black Christians must fight homophobia and advocate for same-sex marriage because of their historical defense of their own right to marry.[61]

In Douglas's view, the black community desperately needs a sexual discourse of resistance to deconstruct the false notions about black sexuality that white culture has invented and to construct accurate and healthy understandings of black sexuality. Insisting on harmonious relationality could build up black self-esteem, improve relationships between black men and women, and empower black youth to exercise their sexuality creatively and well. It could enable black people to see themselves as made in God's image—which white culture has powerfully denied. Douglas asserts, "Without such a discourse

Black people will be handicapped in seeing the face of God that is indeed their face."[62]

Redeeming Christianity

Dualism has been noted as toxic to human bodies by countless Christian scholars; Douglas's critique of platonization applies to virtually all forms of Christianity. Although the black faith tradition has been corrupted by platonization, Douglas believes it is redeemable. With the theological strategy of affirming the black Christ, found in Jesus's ministry as illuminated by the cross and resurrection, it is possible to reclaim the life-giving, body-affirming theological core of black Christianity. Douglas's careful attention to Christianity's core theological claims and her explication of the ways in which they have been co-opted from the very beginning by platonization and power illuminate the elusiveness and fragility of Christian truth.

This does not mean eliminating all the influence of Greek philosophy, which would be both impossible and undesirable. Indeed, the extent to which ancient Greek culture formed Christianity is contested. In his September 2006 remarks at the University of Regensburg, Germany, Pope Benedict XVI stated that the Gospels, written in Greek, have a fundamentally Hellenistic context, so that understanding Greek philosophy is essential to understanding Christianity. For him, Christianity is not merely influenced by Greek thought; Christianity is Greek.[63] Peter Phan disagrees, arguing that Benedict overstates the importance of Greek thought for Christianity's origins; while it is significant, other cultures such as "Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Ethiopian, Assyrian, Indian, and Chinese" have also shaped Christianity.[64] As Phan points out, at stake is the standard account of Christianity's origins and early development as a primarily European phenomenon; historians are now revising this account to reflect Christianity's roots in Asia and Africa.[65] No human culture is perfect; all contain undesirable elements. For Douglas, Christianity is not simply Greek, but rather was shaped by Greek thought in various ways, so that the influences may be disentangled and their suitableness for Christianity evaluated. She aims to identify philosophical influences on the Gospel writers and church traditions that weaken the Incarnation's impact and to try to decrease our reliance on them.

Here I raise two questions that arise as I consider Douglas's ideas from a white perspective. First, what does it mean to claim that enslaved Africans shared a common worldview characterized by harmony? Second, can only black Christianity be redeemed from platonization? Douglas implies that platonization is part of the core of white Christianity, yet only contingent to black Christianity, such that authentic Christianity is black. For white Christians, the implications are dire. While I recognize that Douglas speaks primarily to African Americans, here my goal is to clarify what a white, aspiring antiracist reader may glean from her theology of the black Christ.

Harmonious Relationality

Douglas argues that Africans enslaved in the New World judged Christianity against their traditional African values, accepting what fit and rejecting what did not. This grounds her claim that African American Christians can remove the influence of platonization partly by appealing to their African roots. Acknowledging that when she says "Africa" she means *West* Africa, which is home to many different cultures, Douglas makes two broad generalizations: West African religions profess (1) a monotheistic belief in a supreme deity and (2) a spirit of harmony.[66] In effect, she uses these claims to argue for a basic continuity between "true" (that is, liberating) black Christianity and West African religions. Consonant with the efforts of black scholars who have turned to African history and cultures to understand African American religiosity, Douglas's decision to mine the theological—not only historical or cultural—mother lode of African religions is a brilliant move that expands the now-classic womanist strategy of using black women's literature as a source for Christian theology.

First, the claim that West Africans are monotheistic can highlight significant similarities between African traditional religions and Christianity. Historian Albert Raboteau confirms that West African religions generally profess belief in a supreme or "High God" beyond the various deities who ordinarily interact with the people; ethicist Peter Paris, following African scholars, also describes this belief as monotheistic.[67] Paris even quotes John Mbiti's explanation of how many Africans see correspondences between their High God and the Christian God: "The missionaries who introduced the gospel to African in the past 200 years did not bring God to our continent. Instead, God brought them."[68] This argument recalls Paul's speech to the Athenians in which he claims to have identified their unknown god.[69] Scholars also note that because the lesser spirits are more proximate to everyday African life, they often play a more significant role than the supreme deity; they are sometimes described as roughly analogous to the Christian saints. Thus, Douglas aims to purify black

10.1057/9780230114715 - Racism and the Image of God, Karen Teel

Christian spirituality by appealing to black Christians' African (by which she means non-Christian) roots.

Because U.S. black religious faith is a syncretism of African traditions and European Christianity,[70] this will be a tricky endeavor. What is being compared? On the one hand, should we consider preslavery African traditions, African traditions as transformed by Africans brought to the New World, or African traditional religions as practiced today? On the other hand, should we have in mind slave religion or contemporary black Christianity? Perhaps intentionally, Douglas acknowledges this complexity by referring to African American Christianity not as the "black Christian tradition"—Peter Paris's phrase[71]—but as the "black faith tradition." For her, African traditions appear to function as a parent religion of black U.S. Christian faith, perhaps analogously to the way Judaism is often described as the parent religion of Christianity. This intriguing connection demands further teasing out.

Whatever the precise relationship, it will be important to maintain a distinction (if not a separation) between the U.S. black faith tradition and African religions, not least because African religions are still practiced today. As this discussion continues, care must be taken not to do violence to the particularities of the traditions by either diminishing or overstating their similarities. Indeed, differences can prove instructive. For example, insofar as Christianity has a problem with closed monotheism, the pantheons of African spirits—seen as a real difference from Christian Trinitarian orthodoxy—might well shed new light on it.[72]

Second, drawing upon Paris, Douglas suggests that though African cultures are highly diverse, harmony is a core value of African spirituality. Is it possible to recover a specifically African spirit of harmony? Again, historians can help here. Raboteau emphasizes the diversity of beliefs slaves brought from Africa, beliefs that were radically shaken—often destroyed—by the traumas of the Middle Passage.[73] This also affected Africans who were not taken across the ocean. In her study of slavery on the Gold Coast (now Sierra Leone), for example, historian Stephanie Smallwood points out that "saltwater slavery" functioned as a particularly horrible kind of death: since its victims never returned, it appeared to have the power to eliminate them from the cycle of the ancestors.[74] In Douglas's interpretation of these tragic events, a basic part of the trauma was the violation of the value of harmony. Defining harmony to mean that Africans considered every person sacred, Douglas suggests that Africans' resistance to being enslaved by Europeans stemmed partly from their conviction that “slavery fundamentally denied any notions of harmony.”[75] Douglas suggests that if this idea of harmony were recovered for the black faith tradition today, it would result in the abandonment of sexism and heterosexism.

In bringing this idea forward, harmony and equality will need to be carefully distinguished. In the centuries-old African traditions to which Douglas refers, harmony has not necessarily meant that all people have equal value. This would make it impossible to explain the long history in many African cultures of enslaving and selling Africans to Africans, predating Africans’ selling of one another to Europeans. As Smallwood notes, the Portuguese traders’ initial role in slavery on the African coast was to act as middlemen who facilitated the sale of African slaves from Africans on the Windward Coast to Africans on the Gold Coast.[76] African’s resistance to enslavement—by one another as well as by Europeans—may have stemmed less from a principle of harmony than from, as Paris puts it, the will to survive.[77] As well, scholars have thoroughly documented the traditional patriarchy of African cultures, despite the presence of matrilineal customs. In fact, quoting Paris’s discussion of harmony, Douglas selects a passage that refers to the hierarchical relationship among the divinities as the ground for harmony among all created things.[78] While this African concept of harmony certainly means that there is a particular order in creation, then, it does not necessarily mean equality among persons.

As Douglas indicates, the notion of equality arises later, as part of the U.S. black faith tradition. Paris’s analysis supports Douglas’s claim that equality is central to black Christianity. While Paris believes this value is commensurate with certain African ideas, he attributes its genesis in black Christianity to the Bible; he emphasizes that in the U.S. context, this equality among persons has always been proclaimed specifically as a rejection of white racism.[79] Indeed, tracing the idea of harmony to Africa, Douglas cites James Cone’s explanation that the African American religious themes of justice, love, and hope grew out of the “search for meaning in a white society that did not acknowledge their humanity.”[80] The African concept of harmony, then, undergoes development in order to become “harmonious relationality,” which Douglas suggests will compel respect for varying sexualities.

Douglas’s appeal to harmony as an ancient African concept to improve upon contemporary African American Christianity represents a creative retrieval of an ancient principle. If and when enslaved

Africans in the Americas used the African notion of harmony to critique slavery on the grounds that it violated equality, then in doing so they were already resourcefully engaged in reconstructing their worldview, transforming and transcending the original idea. A more extensive comparative theological study of the African notion of harmony and the Christian notion of equality—acknowledging the limitations and possibilities of each—may well succeed in substantiating Douglas's proposed idea of "harmonious relationality," generating the "perfect storm" she needs to convince black Christians that the best aspects of their theological heritage combine to compel resistance to heterosexism.[81] Douglas's project of redeeming black Christianity from platonization is well underway.

Is the White Faith Tradition Redeemable?

The black faith tradition has a relatively well-documented history, while "whiteness studies," though increasingly recognized in the social sciences, is still in a nascent stage in Christian theology. Nevertheless, the white faith tradition is a phenomenon that can be investigated, especially since European American Christian churches bear the legacy of slaveholding Christianity. Throughout her work, Douglas claims that black Christianity has a recoverable, nonplatonized core: "Black people must reclaim *their own* faith heritage that maintains the sanctity of the body."[82] In contrast, she tends to describe white Christianity as inherently platonized. She is not alone; James W. Perkinson, a white Protestant scholar, argues that white Christianity is so corrupt that white Christians' only hope of salvation is apostasy and conversion to black Christianity.[83] These arguments may shock white Christians into seeing just how badly our tradition has been corrupted. But is apostasy the only answer? Is white racism truly "the source of all sin"?[84] Is there no liberating core of white Christianity?

Since Douglas is an African American scholar working in and for the black church, it is not her task to investigate whether white Christianity can be redeemed. White Christians must do this for ourselves. Her work, like the others studied here, brings us face to face with the fact that white Christianity's collusion with racist supremacy has been so thorough as to be virtually indistinguishable from it. Yet, historically, if U.S. black Christianity emerged from the African encounter with European Christians during the Middle Passage and slavery, then our traditions share a prior history. Not only did the concept of whiteness not exist during the ancient councils, but Augustine, whom Douglas identifies as "the major conduit of platonized Christianity into the Western theological tradition,"[85] represents only one of many ancient African Christian communities. Thus, if platonization is not at the core of authentic black Christianity, then it is possible that it is not at the core of authentic white Christianity either.

By using the term "white Christianity" (following Du Bois), Douglas indicates that platonized Christianity has a special affinity with the dominant white culture that has tended to oppress.[86] This is not, however, because of some evil inherent in light skin or because white people are naturally more sinful than black people. It is because white Christians have held more power. The authentic, retrievable theological core of Christianity as Douglas describes it does not by nature exclude white culture.

White Christianity, then, is not simply synonymous with platonization. If platonization can be removed from the black faith tradition, it must be at least theoretically possible to excise it from the white faith tradition as well. We too must be able, at least theoretically, to creatively reconstruct a nonplatonized faith. This is an uphill battle even in black churches, as Douglas and others attest. Given that we have gained far more from platonization, white Christians can expect to have a much harder time exorcising it. Douglas urges black Christians to see how homophobia harms them; likewise, white Christians must recognize how platonization harms us. Indeed, feminist theologians have long noted that our twisted views of sexual propriety have inflicted pain and suffering not only on nonheterosexual people but also on heterosexuals. Hyper-proper sexuality is no more an accurate reflection of white sexualities than it is of black sexualities.

No matter what path we choose, we will need black people's insights, as well as the insights of all peoples of color. Some of us, with Perkinson, may seek to abandon our whiteness and "become black," if only because it is the most expedient way. Such reasoning resonates with Thomas Aquinas's argument that God gave us sacred doctrine (revelation) because, although we could have discovered these truths ourselves, it would have taken so long and been so difficult and so few people would have been able to do it that God revealed it as a shortcut.[87] To white thinkers aware of our blinders, the light shed by black scholars is indeed a revelation! But it must also be possible to recover a nonplatonized core of the white faith tradition. In fact, Douglas offers several theological entrées into such a discussion. In the spirit of African American biblical interpretation and the spirituality of resistance and survival, she points us to the Gospels; her critique of European Christology, including atonement as well as the difference between the damage of dualism and the promise of paradox, offers fruitful starting points that may appeal to those who prefer to engage the "classical" theological tradition. Thus, white Christians need not despair, for with humility and hard work, our faith tradition may be redeemable.

What color is Christianity? As a contextual theologian, Douglas recognizes that the black faith tradition as we know it today formed when Africans converted to—or at least adopted some elements of—Christianity. Since all forms of Christianity display influences from non-Christian sources, while the categories of "white" and "black" Christianity are useful, neither camp can boast an exclusive claim to authentic Christianity. Black Christians adopted platonization as they adopted Christianity, so there is no original, nonplatonized black faith tradition to which to return. Rather, to reclaim true Christianity with a robust notion of harmonious relationality would be to establish a more authentic form of Christianity than has yet been practiced, one toward which we may all be able to strive together. White Christians can take particular comfort in the fact that Douglas does not claim simply that blackness is salvation. Her black Christ provides a corrective to which all Christians can appeal.

How can we begin? We may start by taking a cue from Douglas's prescription for the black community. For her vision of harmonious relationality to come to fruition, members of the black faith tradition need to hear one another's pain, especially LGBT persons of color, and repent for what the antivalue of platonization has led them to do. They may often choose to do this in private, away from white eyes; however, a few black scholars are already writing about it.[88] Likewise, white Christians need to hear and be transformed by voices of those we have harmed by devaluing the body, not only African Americans and LGBT people but all people, including ourselves.

As we deconstruct the white faith tradition, Douglas's reflections on the image of God may help. Chapter 3 critiqued our white theological tendency to imply that the powerful control whether others image God. Douglas clarifies that we cannot destroy the image of God in other human beings, but we may "preclud[e] her or him from fully experiencing what it means to be created in the image of God."[89] In other words, I cannot stop a person from imaging God, but I may be able to prevent her from realizing that she images God. This way of speaking may help explain what happens when powerless people internalize the dehumanizing narratives that the powerful construct about them, as when slave owners turned slaves like Frederick Douglass into "brutes." Human beings always have agency, even when it is not exercised overtly for fear of the consequences. Just as people who are oppressed retain the capacity for serious sin no matter how severe their oppression, so they always retain the image of God.[90]

Conversely, being created in the image of God does not mean we always succeed in manifesting the image.[91] When powerful people obstruct justice or remain neutral toward victims, we deny the image of God in ourselves. While our self-centeredness cannot destroy the image in us, we can and do render it virtually unrecognizable. Shifting the focus from how the powerful might or might not image God to how people who are oppressed image God can help white thinkers to get ourselves off center stage. Moving ourselves aside—a theme developed further in the next chapter—we may be able to begin to interrogate the white faith tradition's core and contingent beliefs, develop our own sexual discourse of resistance to deplatonize our tradition, and pursue harmonious relationality among ourselves and in relation to everyone.

The Color of Christianity

Given all this, what shall we make of the differences that are sometimes evident between black and white Christian worship styles? Considering them closely in the context of white racist supremacy, we realize that dancing, shouting, and clapping—as well as murmuring and kneeling—occur within very carefully scripted parameters. While black Christians' apparently extravagant body involvement in worship may well have its roots in African ring shouts and circle dances, we can also read it in sharp contrast to the solemn piety that typically characterizes white worship services, which may be traced back to European practices like Puritanism. The difference between black and white worship styles is strangely appropriate. European Americans, who have habitually disregarded the human dignity of entire peoples, need to repent and be humble, to be quiet, to experience God's reproach, things we are rarely compelled to do in our everyday lives due to our white privilege. Conversely, African Americans, who have experienced terrible oppression, need space to breathe, to celebrate themselves, to experience the joy and freedom of God's love, things they are often constrained from doing in their everyday lives because of white supremacy. In our worship practices, both black and white Christians adhere to a script that is perfectly logical given our historical and contemporary circumstances.

Two main insights, then, have emerged from Kelly Brown Douglas's theology as useful for a white thinker trying to articulate Christianity's traditional disdain for (certain) bodies: her critique of "platonization" or dualism, and her insistence on a substantive replacement. First, Douglas's insight about platonization is essential. Christianity is implicated in the devaluation of black bodies; both white and black people have been complicit. This problem is not only the fault of Christians living many centuries after Jesus; it stems from Christianity's origins. Platonization distorts our understanding of the Incarnation and devalues the body, disrupting our capacity for relationship. Though platonization has conferred limited benefits upon black people, it has caused more harm than good; it is heretical and must be discarded. It contradicts a Gospel-based, Christ-centered faith that honors the incarnational paradoxes, both ontological and existential. In particular, it impedes black people's ability to trust their own worth as human beings created in God's image. Douglas believes black people have a special ability and a mandate to promote a nonplatonized—that is, authentic—Christianity. The tyranny of white Christian culture against black people can and must be theologically resisted. White Christians need to face our role in this problem, repent, and work to overcome it.

Second, if Douglas is right to call for the excision of the platonized strand of Christianity—not all Greek influences, but this concept in particular—then this leaves a void that must be filled. Working toward harmonious relationality and a holistic theology of the body and sexuality, Douglas insists that authentic Christianity enhances human flourishing, especially black bodies, as human beings made in God's image and able to resist oppression. Her test case of homosexuality, and her argument that the black community cannot survive without a sexual discourse of resistance that affirms all loving sexual expression, provides an excellent starting point. Will the idea of harmonious relationality function? Perhaps we have all lived under too many false constraints to recognize the healthy exercise of sexuality when we see it. Douglas's proposal to affirm whatever appears to be love driven seems appropriate; we must wait to discover the sexual and body theology that will eventually emerge.

For white readers, an urgent question remains: Can our faith tradition be redeemed? While Douglas holds that platonization is contingent to black faith and a nonplatonized black faith tradition can be reclaimed, she indicates that platonization's effects on white Christianity have been far more dire. White Christians must face this critique honestly and resist the urge to flee from its implications. Yet Douglas's determination that platonization is contingent to the black faith tradition makes a space for us to declare that white racist supremacy is a contingent aspect of our tradition as well. Douglas's quest to define heterosexism and homophobia as changeable beliefs prompts us to assert that racism is also a changeable belief. If harmonious relationality is authentically Christian, we can hope that it will be an option for all of us.

The black Christ, who redeems the theological core of Christianity, calls all of us to follow him. Given our histories, black Christians may recognize him more easily, but white Christians can also come to know him. And though we follow him differently—some rejoicing, some repenting—we may be able to follow him together. Seeking to transform our faith traditions and our relationships, black and white Christians alike must learn to worship the black Christ.

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7

Shoulder to Shoulder: M. Shawn Copeland

In the early 1960s, during the civil rights movement, a Fijian woman studying in the United States was prevented from dining at a local restaurant in the southern town where she was attending a Methodist college. Sue Thrasher, a white student at the same college, introduced a resolution to the student council, using what she later calls "the orthodox language of Methodist doctrine" to condemn the incident of race-based discrimination. She was stunned when "everyone agreed that it was too bad that [the woman] had been discriminated against, but everyone did not agree that something had to be done about it."[1] The motion failed.

Sue Thrasher went on to become a civil rights activist. But, as in the case of her student council, many white Americans saw the struggle for civil rights as exclusively black. European Americans often acknowledged African American suffering, yet felt no compunction to do anything about it. Why was it so difficult for whites to imagine participating in the movement? Reflecting later on the passivity of her friends who claimed to sympathize but declined to act, Thrasher testifies, "There was something very powerful in the act of confronting segregation, in standing up and saying 'No more,' with the body. It was very different than the endless talk about interracial gatherings and working behind the scenes. The action said, 'Now.' "[2]

Swimming against the tide of white society, family, and friends, some white people saw segregation for what it was and took action to fight it. Compassion motivated some: memoirs of European Americans who joined the civil rights movement commonly show that they were impelled by their sense of outrage at the injustices African Americans experienced under segregation. Moreover, a few European Americans saw clearly that this was also properly a white struggle.

Some can recall precisely when this realization struck. When Joan Browning won an academic achievement ("STAR") award as a high school senior, she

> was tickled to be the area's first STAR student, since I've always liked to win. My pride turned to anger, however, when I [learned] that the Chamber of Commerce did not allow the black students in the segregated school to compete. I felt cheated of the chance to compete against all the county's students and have a chance to prove myself the legitimate STAR student. Now I would never know if I were the best student or not.[3]

And Constance Curry remembers an integrated meeting of a regional college student association:

> It was against the law for blacks and whites to eat together, so the YMCA could not permit a lunch gathering. When noon came, the black delegates, some of whom were my friends from the national congresses, walked down the steps of the Y and headed toward Auburn Avenue to the black restaurants. The rest of us walked down the steps and headed in the other direction. I realized then that segregation took away *my* personal freedom as surely as if I were bound by invisible chains.[4]

During the civil rights movement, realizing that segregation "took away *my* personal freedom" provoked at least some European Americans to insert their bodies into the fray.

How can contemporary whites recognize that racism still takes away our freedom? And how can we be impelled to act, to resist injustice not only with our words but also with our actions, our day-to-day decisions, our *bodies*? Exploring these questions, in this chapter I dialogue with M. Shawn Copeland's theology of solidarity. Distilled in her book *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*, Copeland's anthropology takes black women's bodies as a starting point, considering the meaning for all of us of their particular enfleshment of freedom. Drawing upon the ancient Christian proclamation of the image of God in every human being, investigating the relationship between the marks of Jesus's body and the marks of other bodies, Copeland argues that a concrete praxis of solidarity with poor black women—and by extension, with anyone who suffers injustice—is a Christian imperative.

Copeland writes as a Roman Catholic theologian whose proposal for solidarity calls every Christian to action. Yet her theology remains demarcated by her own social location as an African American woman. By this I mean that in remembering and honoring black women's bodies, it is not Copeland's responsibility to help white readers to understand the implications of this task for our own bodies. We must do this in order to see why and how we, precisely as white, might undertake the concrete practices of solidarity Copeland advocates.

Sue Thrasher's analysis of whites' reluctance to join the civil rights movement reveals that white apathy toward injustice is no mere mental or spiritual laziness: it arises and is played out in our bodies. Until we understand how racism constrains us, we cannot fully comprehend why building solidary relationships is essential to our own liberation. To this end, this chapter presents an overview of Copeland's argument in *Enfleshing Freedom*, highlights three themes of her work that may impel white readers toward solidarity, and brings a white theological proposal for solidarity into conversation with Copeland's. In the end, Copeland guides us to discover that repentance and conversion must play an enormous role in the spiritual, affective, and bodily work of white people who wish to undertake concrete practices of solidarity.

Enfleshing Freedom: A Body Theology of Solidarity

In *Enfleshing Freedom*, M. Shawn Copeland places black women's suffering bodies—past and present—at the center of theology. By looking at the particularities of black women's experiences, she aims to illuminate something universal about humanity. "Taking black women's bodies as a prism" yields insight into the "theological anthropological relation between the social body and the physical body."[5] The similarities between the suffering of black women's bodies and the suffering body of Jesus show how all human bodies have been devalued since the beginning of African slavery in the New World. Things are not as they should be, and Christians in particular ought to notice, because Jesus's suffering body directs us to suffering bodies in our own time. Jesus's suffering embraces black women's suffering and paradoxically gives them hope.[6] Looking at them, Copeland claims, we can see the divine capacity for love.

For Copeland, because God is revealed through the human body, it demands respect, and solidarity and Eucharist are the way to transformation. Respecting the memory and reality of black women's suffering translates into "compassionate practices of solidarity," "a set of body practices."[7] This literally means stopping the violence and healing the harm that has been done to so many bodies. Copeland sets out to construct "a theological anthropology worthy of reclaiming black women's bodies" to make it possible to reclaim all human bodies.[8]

Enfleshing Freedom begins with a philosophical description and history of racism using the work of the twentieth-century philosopher and theologian Bernard Lonergan. Copeland explains that racism is a "bias" that places entire groups of people outside the sphere of our care and concern, or "horizon." By framing racism as a problem of faulty vision, Copeland emphasizes the limited nature of all human knowledge and the crippling limitations of racist perspectives. Specifically, echoing a broader judgment made by James Cone, she asserts, "White racist supremacy is the scotoma of Catholic theology."[9] White Catholic theologian Jon Nilson has also used Lonergan's notion of "scotosis" or blindness to describe racist ways of knowing, especially among theologians.[10] These descriptions rightly frame white supremacy not only as a moral failing but also as an epistemological problem in which the white knower, often subconsciously but sometimes actively, seeks to know *less than is good for one*.[11]

Second, Copeland explores the agency of black women who were enslaved. The attack on black women's bodies, insofar as it was an attempt to deprive them of their dignity as human persons, was an attack on the *imago dei*. While most enslaved black women did not survive to be liberated, all loved freedom and resisted enslavement however they could. Freedom constitutes the resacralization of black women's bodies, the restoration of the image of God. Evoking the clearing scene in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, where Baby Suggs calls the people to *be themselves* and to love each precious body part, Copeland observes that here Baby Suggs "re-members broken bodies, heals torn flesh…speaks into new life God's image in black flesh."[12] In Baby Suggs's hands, black bodies reclaim their rightful status as human bodies. For Copeland, this novel "mediates a healing performative midrash on the incarnation of *imago Dei*."[13]

Third, Copeland considers Jesus as the paradigm for humanity: he is freedom enfleshed. Since the Incarnation requires respect for the body, and Jesus's body was oppressed, paying attention to the marks of Jesus's body points today not only to poor black women's bodies but also to homosexual bodies. For Copeland, fear of gay and lesbian bodies discloses fear of Christ: homophobia is Christophobia.[14] Why, in a book focused around black women's bodies, does Copeland turn to gay and lesbian bodies without highlighting the experiences of black lesbians? Perhaps because no one is seriously arguing today that black bodies cannot image God, while many Christian churches teach that homosexual bodies contravene God's will. Whereas black women's bodies were victimized in the empire of (Christian) slavery, homosexual bodies are the primary victims of the empire of (Christian) capitalism. Returning repeatedly to the hope for resurrection as the liberation of our desires, Copeland emphasizes, "We are the body raised up by Christ for himself within humanity; through us, the flesh of the crucified and resurrected Jesus is extended through time and space."[15] We are the flesh of Christ, we are one another. The "marks" of our bodies must not be hidden; they must be clearly evident for us to be able to recognize Jesus in one another. "The body of Jesus of Nazareth impels us to place the bodies of the victims of history at the center of theological anthropology, to turn to 'other' subjects."[16] Remembering the marks of Jesus's body compels us to solidarity with marked bodies today.

Fourth, Copeland clarifies that the "other" subjects toward whom she wishes to turn theology's attention are not only poor black women but all those whose voices have been silenced since European domination throughout the world began centuries ago. In a world severely stratified by race, sex, and economics, solidarity means engaging in concrete practices that resist and subvert the unjust status quo. For Copeland, then, solidarity with poor women of color is a necessary starting point, one that is "basic to the realization of our humanness."[17] But it is not a stopping point. It directs all of us, in our present age, to discover those in whose bodies Jesus is now making himself visible to us and to join together in a solidarity that proleptically forms the mystical body of Christ.[18]

Finally, Copeland reminds us that the Eucharist commemorates Jesus's giving of his own life in the struggle. This is not to say that such a death should be our goal: indeed, insofar as the Eucharist is a memorial to a "first-century lynching," in our context "notions and speech about self-sacrifice and reconciliation are suspect."[19] The wounds and scars on enslaved and victimized bodies are "another stigmata" that can reveal both human cruelty and God's love. And because of the resurrection, the suffering of victims of cruelty and injustice, including Jesus, actually "anticipates an enfleshment of freedom and life to which Eucharist is linked ineluctably."[20]

In this brief and powerful foray into the mystery of being human, Copeland begins to do that toward which the present work also gestures: she constructs a theological anthropology that, by attending to the sacred nature of human bodies, may be able to inspire Christians to resist racism in concrete relationships and actions of solidarity. Especially as a call to African Americans to re-member their history, resacralize their bodies, and honor their humanity by joining in solidarity with all marked bodies, *Enfleshing Freedom* succeeds remarkably. Yet for European American Christians reading this book, the danger that we will yet again hear, sympathize, and fail to act persists. This is due not to any failing of the book itself, but to our particular biases and limited horizons. If we listen carefully, Copeland's ideas propel us forward.

Toward a White Anthropology of Solidarity

In his ministry, Jesus not only tried to renew and liberate Israel, but also denounced the vagaries of Roman oppression.[21] Attentive contemporary Christians, then, can surmise that today Jesus not only desires the liberation of people who are oppressed, such as African Americans and people who are homosexual; he also denounces racism, white supremacy, and homophobia and calls oppressors to change our ways. In other words, Jesus came not merely to forgive our sins but to tell us to go and sin no more.[22] White people often find it easy to affirm the former, which requires only assent and gratitude, but very difficult to do the latter, which demands hard work. This section explores three themes in *Enfleshing Freedom* that may urge European American Christians toward honestly assessing and addressing our racism: Copeland's language about bodies and the image of God; her reclamation of the mystical body of Christ; and her insistence that we attend to the suffering of Jesus and all victimized bodies.

Bodies and the Image of God

Attending to the Genesis creation narrative that has been so central to Christians' understanding of human nature and the image of God, Copeland lifts up the *imago dei* and the resulting "distinct capacity for communion with God" as one of "three convictions central to theological anthropology."[23] Any authentic Christian teaching on human persons must honor the image of God that is present in each of us. That image may be seen and touched in the human body, "a site of divine revelation," a sacrament,[24] the original form of the person into which God breathes God's spirit.[25] As a symbol in the deepest sense, the body does not only signify what it represents; it *is* what it represents, it is the *imago dei*. Here Copeland's book corroborates the central proposal of the present work: the body, not only the soul, can image God.

Slavery denied the fundamental truth that the human person is always more than a body, that bodies mediate divine revelation and are therefore sacred. By reducing the black body to an "animal" body, denying its sacred character, and rendering it a commodity, slavery "aimed to deface the *imago Dei* in black human beings."[26] Some slave owners argued that slaves' dark bodies were not made in God's image but were "inferior, natural slaves."[27] Careful historical awareness of this lie also calls our attention to "contemporary stereotypes about black women" that "objectify, exploit, and deface God's image in black womanhood."[28] One way white people have sought to deface the image of God in black people is by defining blackness itself as ugly.

Meditating on this problematic history, Copeland is nevertheless able to connect beauty with the *imago dei*. Though this may not initially seem surprising to white readers, the courage of her move becomes apparent when one realizes that, as Mary Helen Washington states, "The idea of beauty as defined by white America has been an assault on the personhood of the black woman."[29] Given this reality, it would be reasonable for Copeland to dismiss the very idea of beauty as degrading, or to formulate an oppositional view in which *only* black is beautiful. Instead, by insisting that black women are beautiful because of—not despite—their blackness, Copeland formulates a concept of beauty that, in connecting beauty with the image of God, transcends skin color: "Beauty is the living up to and living out the love and summons of creation in all our particularity and specificity as God's human creatures, made in God's own image and likeness."[30] In attending to the particularities of black women's bodies, Copeland's formulation does not reject the concept of beauty as applicable to particular bodies. On the contrary, it universalizes and builds upon it. With it we can acknowledge the beauty of every human person in all her particularity. Building upon the physical beauty of the human form, Copeland emphasizes that it is primarily because bodies are the image of God that we are beautiful; if we actively live out that image, through relationships of solidarity, then those actions constitute beauty as well. Here, beauty is truly more than meets the eye.

Copeland suggests that *Enfleshing Freedom* can be read as a meditation on Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Especially through Baby Suggs, who gathers the people together in a holy place and commands them to love their bodies, "*Beloved* mediates a healing performative midrash on the incarnation of *imago Dei*."[31] Baby Suggs, speaking to and for the black community, does not deny the image of God in white bodies; that is not her task. Her calling is to remind black people that they must reclaim their own humanness, love their bodies, because

> yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it…They do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face 'cause they don't love that either. *You* got to love it, *you*!…And all your inside parts that they'd just as soon slop for hogs, you got to love them…Hear me now, love your heart. For this is the prize.[32]

In Copeland's reading, Baby Suggs's words restore the image of God in black bodies.[33] They are human and they are beautiful.

What about white people who also wish to participate in the re-membering of black bodies as beautiful, God's image in black? Wanting to join the healing celebration, can we enter the clearing? Pausing at the edge, we listen to the word Baby Suggs has for us:

> Here, in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. You do not love our flesh. You despise it. You do not love our eyes; you'd just as soon pick em out. And you ain't in love with our mouth. You see it broken and break it again. What we say out of it you will not heed. What we scream from it you do not hear. What we put into it to nourish our body you snatch away and give us leavins instead. No, you do not love our mouth. And you do not love our neck unnoosed and straight. *We* got to love it! This is flesh I'm talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved.[34]

Hearing Baby Suggs's words, we dare not intrude; we dare not tread on the sacred ground of the clearing. Yet, although Baby Suggs's words convict us, they do not condemn us. Before we can understand the work that the bodies in the clearing are doing, before we can join with them in solidarity, we must remember and repent our attacks on the *imago dei* in them, and recognize how we have also defaced it in ourselves. We must re-member the image of God in our own bodies.

The Mystical Body of Christ

In her theology of solidarity, Copeland highlights the mystical body of Christ. Though the relevance and usefulness of this metaphor may not be immediately obvious, she argues that it is shorthand for

God's healing power, "a rich and multivalent way of signifying the concrete oneness of humanity, Christ's identification with the one human race in his own body, New Testament language about the body, and the sacrament of the Eucharist."[35] She understands the mystical body through Lonergan's Trinitarian "fivefold dynamics of love": love that begins among the persons of the Trinity, overflows into the Incarnation, and manifests itself in Jesus's human love for all human persons, which reveals the love of God the Father for all human persons and finally flowers in the love of human persons for one another.[36] Because every human person is a child of this loving God, we are all truly brothers and sisters to one another.

The mystical body of Christ, as a metaphor for this intimate relationship, connects us all as members of the same family, parts of a body. In and through our bodies, we are linked through our relationship with Christ. When God becomes human, Jesus's love for us not only represents divine love, it is also human love made perfect; it is what we long for.[37] Joining in solidarity with people who are oppressed and outcast, both by who he is and by what he does, Jesus reveals the character of authentic human love.

Moreover, Copeland believes the mystical body of Christ, with its eschatological connotations, can remind us that salvation will never come about in this life, even if we should succeed in building a completely just society.[38] Our efforts always point beyond human society to the kingdom of God that will be fully realized only at the end of time. Cautioning here against the elision of human justice and divine salvation, Copeland insists that only God can save us. This is a very important caution for white Christians, many of whom want to be able to save ourselves—to fix problems and forget about them. Relying on God's grace is essential if we are trying to be antiracist, because when we face the problem honestly, we realize that nothing we do will ever be enough; we will never be able to "fix" it, to make it as though it had never been.

Copeland's turn to the mystical body of Christ arises not out of disdain for human bodies but precisely out of her high regard for them. "For her the Mystical Body is never just mystical but always mystical-political, never triumphal but always rooted in 'the anguish of the victims.' "[39] Indeed, Jesus, his own body marked with the signs of empire, lived a life of compassionate solidarity and died rather than forsake it. He "calls us to break bonds imposed by imperial design, to imagine and grasp and realize ourselves as his own flesh, as the body of Christ."[40] Seeing ourselves, all of us together, as the body of

Christ, *one* body, can break down the artificial separations between us. Specifically, "only by confronting and combating White racist supremacy can we take the first steps toward realizing ourselves as the Body of Christ."[41]

Even on the level of the physical, our bodies are interconnected. On this point the German Catholic theologian Karl Rahner, having emphasized that God created humanity from the dust—as part of the material world—suggests that

> in some sense we are an open system. Of course, I can say, "This chair is not part of my body." But when we ask in terms of physics what that actually means, then the matter becomes very obscure. If there were no moon or sun, our bodies would be different, too. In a certain sense—and I am exaggerating here, in order to make what I want to say clearer—we are all living in one and the same body—the world.[42]

Yet even while acknowledging that our material existence is a good and irreducible aspect of our being, Rahner and Copeland both point out that we are always *more* than our bodies: we are spirit. Spirit is not opposed to body, but transcends it; as Copeland says, the body mediates divine presence. Conversely, divine presence is experienced only in and through the body.

In this light, the metaphor of the mystical body of Christ may enable us to comprehend the complex nature of our bodies, interconnected yet still distinct. All of us, Jesus included, have our own bodies, not to be confused with one another. While the absence of pain in my body may lull me into complacency, it never assures me that no body is being tortured. Yet acknowledging membership in the mystical body of Christ, perhaps I can grasp that my neighbor's suffering is my own.

Further, the mystical body of Christ ensures that we can never forget what we have been. Bodies have histories. Visible marks of our pasts remain: scars and deformities recall diseases or injuries, inflicted accidentally or intentionally; gray hairs, wrinkles, distended tattoos or piercings reveal our age; stretch marks and sagging breasts testify to long years of pregnancy and nursing. Jesus's resurrected body, in all its glory, continues to bear the marks of his suffering and death, his refusal to dodge the ultimate peril of solidarity. We may say, then, that the mystical body of Christ too is scarred and marked with our human history, showing precisely where we have succeeded and failed to honor one another as members of the body. As white people, we must seek to know which of these harms have been inflicted by us, or by people who could be taken for us. And once we begin to know, to expand our horizon and cure our blindness, to experience the pain we have inflicted upon our body, how do we respond? Do we persist in actions, reactions, or inactions that slow or prevent the healing of open wounds? Or do we adopt concrete practices to heal our "body of broken bones"?[43]

Returning to the clearing, we can see now that the work of Baby Suggs is not only to re-member the bodies of black people and restore the image of God in them to wholeness. She is healing the very body of Christ. As the gathered people give expression to their deepest emotions and learn to love every part of themselves, as their relationships with themselves and with one another are restored, the body of broken bones is being knit back together. As white observers we remain on the edges, so as not to interfere in this sacred process; yet insofar as we are part of that body, the mystical body of Christ, what happens in the clearing begins to heal us too. As our regret and repentance grows, as we deconstruct our view of ourselves, we may yet rejoice—from a distance—in Baby Suggs's restorative words that bring the people back to wholeness. Witnessing to the necessity and the rightness of this event, we take a crucial step toward restoring the image of God in ourselves. Both for those inside and for those outside, the mystical body of Christ is re-membered in the clearing.

The Surd of Suffering

In all of her work, but especially in *Enfleshing Freedom*, Copeland returns again and again to the problem of suffering: the suffering of black bodies, the suffering of Jesus. Suffering is the result of evil—something that should not be—and Copeland sensitively portrays black women's sufferings not as a spectacle, but as a way of remembering, honoring, and striving to avoid the repetition of this tragic past. Yet Christians have often used the fact of Jesus's suffering to justify the sufferings we fail to resist or, worse, inflict upon one another. Careful attention to Copeland's "meditation on theological anthropology" may give rise to a more adequate Christian theology of suffering, one that exposes the inadequacy of such excuses.

At its root, Copeland's theology turns on the meaning of Jesus's suffering and death. She emphasizes its sacrificial character, describing it as a "loving self-donation" and insisting that Jesus became "a body broken and poured out for us *all*."[44] Again, lamenting the effects of the fall, she says, "Another choice in another garden and submission to another tree restored the whole."[45] Such phrasings imply approval of Jesus's acceptance of death, even granting it salvific power. But Copeland also indicts the crucifixion as a "first-century lynching."[46] Lynching is evil. If Jesus is truly human, as Christians affirm, then can it be possible that lynching was good in this one case—that it was God's preferred method for saving us? What is the meaning of this apparent ambiguity, this "dangerous memory"?[47]

In an essay entitled "'Wading Through Many Sorrows,'"[48] Copeland proposes an outline for a womanist theology of suffering. She shows that when black women experience, reflect upon, judge, and evaluate their sufferings, they enact a critically realistic perspective, always recognizing that for them, as Katie Cannon says, "suffering is the normal state of affairs."[49] It would be better if black women had never suffered, but they have. The question, then, is what they do with their suffering, how they deal with it and interpret it. As black women remember their sufferings, resist to be free, and redeem Christianity from white supremacy, they search for meaning in their sufferings.[50]

What meaning? Certainly not a mistaken belief that suffering is good, which Copeland, following Dorothee Soelle, aptly terms "Christian masochism."[51] Consider the epigraph to the volume in which "'Wading Through Many Sorrows'" appears, a verse by Emilie Townes:

> evil is a force outside us
> suffering makes you stronger
> lies
> lies
> lies
> to my very deepest soul
> there is a troubling in my soul[52]

The troubling in black women's souls tells them, perhaps, that suffering does not make them stronger; it is better avoided. Copeland confirms, "Christian solidarity repudiates every form of masochism and any assent to suffering for its own sake."[53]

Yet even when black women cannot choose not to suffer, they can choose their responses to the situations in which they find themselves. If their options are limited such that no matter what they choose, someone will suffer, then in choosing less suffering over more, they shape their lives and those around them for the better. Copeland describes enslaved women, such as Mattie Jackson's mother, who went without food to feed their children to avert the worse evil of the children going hungry; or Linda Brent (Harriet Jacobs), who endured years of discomfort and deprivation in a cramped attic crawlspace to free her children and avoid sexual torture by her master, which might have destroyed her.[54] Hunger and deprivation did not make these women stronger; if they could have obtained the goods they sought without suffering, they surely would have done so. But by choosing the least horrible alternatives, they secured goods that were otherwise unattainable. In Copeland's words, these women were caught but not trapped[55] because they retained the ability to resist, to survive, and indeed to redeem Christianity from white supremacy.

Clearly, when no suffering-free option is available, one should make the choice that leads to less suffering. The value of such a choice lies not in any supposed inherent goodness of suffering, but in the survival and resistance of the ones "caught" and in the witness they may afford to the sinfulness of the actions of the "captors." While the choice itself may be good, however, the suffering that follows upon such a choice does not thereby become good—Copeland rightly warns against the "*ersatz* spiritualization of evil and suffering."[56] This error may seem obvious, but the idea that all suffering, including Jesus's, is a direct result of evil and contrary to God's will represents a basic paradigm shift for some Christians. In particular, European American Christians tend to mistakenly believe that human suffering is willed or at least permitted by God because it leads to an enhanced appreciation of happiness, to spiritual growth, or even to salvation. The point, therefore, bears repeating: suffering is evil. When our options have been circumscribed so that we cannot choose not to suffer, this does not prove that it is God's will that we suffer. Instead, such circumscription is most often a result of human sinfulness: in the case of black women, the sin of white supremacy and racism.

The suggestion that God did not will Jesus's suffering may strike some as radical or even blasphemous. Listening to Jesus's words as he experienced his passion and death may make this point clearer. The gospels tell us that in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus becomes grieved, distressed, agitated; he moves away from his friends to plead, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want."[57] This prayer is often read as a plea to God to change God's mind about commanding Jesus to suffer a horribly painful death, a plea that God denies because only innocent suffering can satisfy God for the insult of human sinfulness. Is this accurate? It certainly seems clear that, like any sane person, Jesus wants to avoid suffering. He prays to alert his Father that, against his will, the worst is happening: his life is going to be brought to a sudden, tragic end. Is this a request to be let off the hook, where Jesus squirms like a worm about to be eaten by a fish? Does God hold the fishing line? Is it Jesus's innocent suffering that persuades God to reel us back in? In other words, when Jesus states that he will do what God wants, is it his death that God wants? Does his suffering restore the bond between humans and God?

By focusing her theology around solidarity as a concrete practice of the Christian community,[58] Copeland gestures toward an answer. As Delores Williams and others have shown, by broadening our focus outward from the single, brief event of Jesus's death to his life of solidarity with people who are oppressed and outcasts, we can comprehend Jesus's death not as a good in itself, but as a consequence of the life he lived.[59] This is not to insist that a tragic death was inevitable for Jesus (though given the state of the world, it was likely), but simply to observe that it is what happened to him. But it is not what he wants or what God wants for him. Like Linda Brent and Mattie Jackson's mother, Jesus faces a choice between two evils. He must be "betrayed into the hands of sinners"[60] or betray his commitment to solidarity with us. Since abandoning us would be the greater evil, he chooses the way of the cross. Read this way, Jesus was tempted not to *disobey a divine command to suffer* but to *betray the divine decision to be in solidarity with us*, no matter the cost. In Copeland's words, "Jesus died, rather than betray his mission, his love for God and for human beings."[61] His mission was not to die, but to love.

As with black women who make impossible choices, however, this does not make Jesus's suffering good. How do we know? Jesus states that he is *willing* to take up the cross, but by no means is he *eager* to do so. Indeed, Matthew and Mark say that Jesus repeats his plea to his Father no less than three times; Luke tells us that Jesus prays in such agony that his sweat becomes like drops of blood falling to the ground. Deserted by his friends, tortured, carrying his cross, his pain is real. And when, having been crucified, he finally succumbs to his agony, he cries out to God, "Why have you forsaken me?"[62] Here Jesus surely speaks for himself. But he also speaks for all of us: Why do we suffer? Why do we inflict such pain upon one another? If you're there, God, why don't you stop us?

The gospel accounts tell us that Jesus never reconciled himself to the surd of evil and suffering. Neither should we. Jesus's death was a first-century lynching. Since lynching is evil, it would have been better if Jesus had not died in this fashion. He was "broken and poured out for us" only because the alternative—abandoning us—was unacceptable. If any comfort is taken from his suffering, it must arise from his witness to solidarity, from the assurance it gives that God hates suffering. When Christians memorialize Jesus's death in the Eucharist, what we celebrate is Jesus's choice to be with us to the end. And in so doing, we call upon ourselves to make that choice for one another, in remembrance of him. This choice manifests itself concretely: "In remembrance of the Body of Christ broken for the world, the followers of Jesus, in solidarity with one another, stand shoulder-to-shoulder, beside and on the side of exploited, despised, poor women of color."[63]

Indeed, Jesus's life and death are not all we remember: we remember too that God raised him from the dead! As Jon Sobrino clarifies, the resurrection is God's answer, not just to the fact of Jesus's death, but to the way he died.[64] God says to Jesus—one member of the Trinity to another, creator to created—"No! Your murder was sin. It should never have happened; and I will make it so, as hope for all the world. In raising you up to eternal life I affirm your earthly life of solidarity, so that you may draw many to follow you and do likewise." This resurrection hope is the true meaning of the cross, redeemed by black women through their particular enfleshment of freedom.

Now we may be in a better position to see why reporting and reflecting upon the particular sufferings of black women forms the backbone of *Enfleshing Freedom*. Never glorifying suffering, Copeland insists we remember it, keeping the details in our hearts. Attending to specific bodies who suffer, we honor their experiences and celebrate their acts of resistance, their human drive for freedom. This may indeed help those who come to dance, cry, and play in Baby Suggs's clearing to come to terms with what has happened to them, to honor that past without repeating it, to stand in solidarity, and even, in time, to work in solidary relationships with those who have oppressed them, if not to forgive.

For those of us outside the clearing, Copeland pushes us further. We remember not only to memorialize suffering and celebrate resistance and solidarity, but also to understand what we have done to black people and to ourselves, to renounce these things, and to strive toward more adequate ways of being human. In addition to courage, fortitude, perseverance, and trust, we need most of all the graces of repentance and conversion.

White Bodies on the Margins

How can European American Christians stand in solidarity with one another and with our brothers and sisters of color against the forces of dehumanization—some of which come from us? Awareness and pity are not enough; Copeland prescribes "personal encounter, responsible intellectual preparation, and healing and creative action for change in society . . . [and] critique of self, of society, of church . . . authentic repentance."[65] Given our particular histories, white Christians approach these steps toward solidarity in distinctive ways. If we join Copeland in placing black women's suffering bodies at the center of theology, we have to relocate our white oppressor bodies to the margins. It is not Copeland's task to parse the implications of this move for us; we must take it up ourselves.[66]

Enfleshing Freedom contends, rightly, that facing the past is essential to solidarity in the present. While most black people are acutely conscious of their history, white people are not always aware that we got to where we are largely by creating and perpetuating social structures that oppress people. Continuing ignorance guarantees continuing complicity. It is impossible to form effective relationships of solidarity if we do not know why particular kinds of solidarity are needed. Just as black people honor their heritage of survival, resistance, and work for liberation, as well as acknowledging the times they have failed to do these things well, white people must take responsibility for our history and current status as oppressors, as well as embracing our alternative history of abolitionism and activism.[67] Then we can begin to repent of our failures—not flagellating ourselves so that we are paralyzed by guilt, but seeking transformation.

If white people wish to engage with people of color in solidarity, we need conversion to new ways of thinking and being. While Copeland utilizes Lonergan's categories of horizon and bias, conversion—also important for Lonergan—is not a major theme of *Enfleshing Freedom*, though Copeland has explored it elsewhere.[68] This may be because, as an African American woman, Copeland does not need to repent of the sins she asks us to remember; her response can immediately be one of solidarity. It may also be because she knows white people must ourselves realize our need to change in order to be capable of effective solidarity.

This conversion is a lifelong process. So far, only a few white theologians have begun to examine it.[69] In particular, Tammerie Day's solidary theology of white liberation[70] dovetails helpfully with

Copeland's ideas, even though Day's work draws primarily on Latina/o theology and is not explicitly informed by Copeland. Perceptive readers will have noticed that, on principle, this book has not appealed at length to European American thinkers. In this case, by aligning Day's thought with Copeland's, I intend not to displace Copeland's voice from the center of this undertaking, but to augment my own ability to listen well by working with a white theologian who consciously stands outside the clearing, mulling over how to proceed.

Day's "solidary theology" investigates precisely what white conversion might look like and aims to construct a soteriology that "envisages salvation as the restoration of the imago dei in humanity."[71] She understands white liberation as bound up with the liberation of people we have historically oppressed. While this goal evinces an unmistakable synergy with Copeland's project, as a white thinker, Day proceeds differently. Acknowledging her great debt to the women of color who have guided her work, Day holds herself accountable to them as best she can; trusting people of color, following their lead, is the best route to justice.[72] In this spirit, Day delves into Latina/o theologies, the history of the Rio Grande delta, and her family history and experiences as a white "native" of that region. "Stance analysis" is her term for reflection not only on one's social location, but also on one's response to that location: "What will you stand *for*? What can you *not* stand? Who will you stand *with*?"[73] With this background, Day develops a threefold process for white people working toward solidarity: conscientization, conversion, and change. For a white audience, these steps can flesh out Copeland's call to "personal encounter, responsible intellectual preparation, and healing and creative action for change in society."[74]

First, *conscientization* means coming to a better understanding of reality. Here, proximity matters. If we want to grasp viscerally that all kinds of people are good and worthwhile, we must get to know them. By educating ourselves, by not eliding real differences into our own experiences, we engage in Copeland's "responsible intellectual preparation."[75] Day emphasizes the importance of being able to feel our whiteness; beginning by reading what people of color have written is more respectful than imposing on them to explain everything to us personally.[76] For white people, this is an important amplification of Copeland's call to remember. Also, following Copeland's directive to "personal encounter," we need to get out of our white enclaves and start working, living, and worshiping with the people with whom we want to stand. Drawing on the work of Ada María Isasi-Díaz, Day emphasizes that "solidarity begins with the construction of relationships in which dialogue can happen and mutuality can develop."[77] As we get to know people, we will begin to grasp the dynamics at work in their lives. Repentance can be uncomfortable, unsettling, distressing.[78] But being affected by the pain of those we have harmed and feeling the pain we have caused ourselves is a necessary step toward solidarity.[79] Nothing can substitute for waiting, listening, and trusting people to make their needs known.[80] In this way, we can strive to put down the master's tools, even to move out of the master's house.

Second, for white people, *conversion* means rejecting unearned privileges and beginning to work for justice. Copeland connects "horizon analysis," comparable to Day's "stance analysis," with conversion.[81] With white antiracist activist Tim Wise, Day argues that white people lose the ability to image God when we collude with our white-skin privilege.[82] Being converted from our privileged mindset and actively fighting oppression restores the image of God: "Living into the image of God necessarily means learning to love as God does, to join in the work God is doing to bring more justice, grace and peace into human relations."[83] Much like Copeland, Day argues that imaging God means opposing the forces of empire, not least because Jesus did so.[84] And Day insists on the embodied nature of this work: "Just as our embodied lives are warped by the forces of racism and white privileging, so our work for justice and liberation must take embodied shape."[85]

Third, *change* must result from our conversion. Where Copeland's third directive is to undertake "healing and creative action for change in society," Day makes clear that white people must seek to change not only society, but also ourselves. As we rehumanize ourselves, we are transformed into something new. This process can be uncomfortable. Leaving the reassuring familiarity of privilege requires us to give up a lot: our ideal of ourselves and our history as innocent; sometimes even treasured relationships with family and friends. Through interviews with several antiracist activists, Day confirms that this kind of liberation sometimes does not feel very liberating.[86] But, she argues, white people who work through conscientization, conversion, and change can hope that our attempts at solidarity might actually be effective. And the joy that comes with conversion and solidary action, knowing that we are seeing what is really there and making a difference for the better, even if only in ourselves, makes it worthwhile.[87]

What, then, is solidarity? Day insists that solidarity should not be confused with advocacy—a mistake white people commonly make when we do not see that we need liberation at least as much as the people we seek to help. For Day, “solidary praxis offers a possibility for liberative transformation for those complicit with oppression that advocacy does not.”[88] She also cautions that solidarity should not be confused with reconciliation. Reconciliation implies the existence of a previous state of harmony to which we can return, which is not true of U.S. whites and any people of color. Day urges “a focus on relationship-building rather than an assumption of the possibility of reconciliation.”[89] Reconciliation is not necessary for solidarity; indeed, it may only be possible beyond solidarity.[90] Solidarity, then, means concrete practices for change in society—specifically, building relationships in which we can work together toward justice.

Most of all, Day emphasizes, for white people, solidarity means liberating ourselves from our own sinful tendency to dominate. Our healing and creative action (Copeland) must include abandoning privileged practices and developing community-building practices.[91] Indeed, Day seeks first to liberate white people and second to benefit communities of color. Her priorities reflect the reality that our work, though essential, may not directly benefit people of color.[92] Our task is to rehumanize ourselves by decolonizing our white minds, souls,[93] and bodies.

This is not easy. Having suffered multiple kinds of oppression in her life, including abuse by a sibling and discrimination on account of being lesbian and female, Day reports that the most difficult to heal is her internalized racism and white-skin privilege.[94] Showing just how difficult this can be, Tim Wise relates a story about his white grandmother, Mabel Wise, who at age seventeen had intimidated her own father into leaving the Klan and accepting her Jewish husband-to-be, and all her life had made a habit of confronting racism. When she became elderly and suffered memory loss from Alzheimer’s disease, Mabel could no longer identify her own children or grandchildren, but she did remember how to insult her African American caretakers when she got upset. The racism she had learned as a child was stronger even than Alzheimer’s.[95] Coming to terms with the depth of our internalized racism is unpleasant, to say the least.

Moreover, solidary practices and relationships require hard, slow, unglamorous work. Day recounts a few solidary actions in which she has participated: equalizing the pastors’ salaries at her church, when Day’s had been higher due to her formal education, while her Latina copastor’s community experience was not rewarded; following up, in multiple conversations, a racist comment she had made.[96] Since reconciliation is not assured, it is not the case in solidary relationships that everyone suddenly gets along. Many white people will be disappointed to find that we will not automatically be liked or trusted by the people with whom we work. For all these reasons and more, we may avoid the solidarity to which Copeland, Day, and others are calling us. Yet consider the alternative: allowing injustice to continue unchallenged; remaining collaborators, oppressors, permanently dehumanized. Day testifies, "We cannot let the fact that we cannot do all, and we cannot do perfectly, keep us from doing what we can."[97]

In the end, Copeland and Day both offer solidarity as hope.[98] As Day observes, to be in solidarity is to restore the image of God in ourselves and to imitate Jesus: "in the incarnation *God enters into a true solidarity with all humanity* that restores the image of God in us after sin has corrupted it. One means of restoration of the *imago dei* is through processes of liberation from oppressing and from being oppressed."[99] As white people settle into our place on the margins and strive for solidarity with the people in the center, our solidarity must take the form of action, not only feeling; it must be embodied, as God's love for us is embodied.[100] Copeland concludes, "Embodying Christ is discipleship, and discipleship is embodied praxis."[101]

Struggling Toward Resurrection

Why should white people actively seek out ways to insert our bodies into solidary relationships with people of color? M. Shawn Copeland's theological proposal for solidarity with black women reveals that such relationships are essential to our liberation. White supremacy and racism not only devastate the bodies of black women, they also destroy our freedom to love and they dishonor our own bodies.

When we remember our history and attend seriously to Copeland's themes of body and image of God, the mystical body of Christ, and the surd of suffering, we realize that white people, aspiring to antiracism, cannot suddenly practice effective solidarity. It takes time and painstaking effort to free ourselves from our profound ignorance. Tammerie Day's process of conscientization, conversion, and change offers one possible way to proceed. Repentance is a necessary first step. Only by carefully cultivating self-awareness and transforming ourselves can we hope to make any difference in the lives of the people around us.

Arguing that the body is a "site and mediation of divine revelation," Copeland affirms the central proposal of this book: the human body should be honored as part of the *imago dei*. Copeland's "meditation on theological anthropology" confirms that freedom is concrete: it means nothing apart from bodies, from people who either are or are not free. Through remembering and honoring particular people's struggles for freedom, we can appreciate its true meaning. Enslaved black women, surviving and resisting their suffering, expressed the divine call to freedom in their bodies. Their "absolute enfleshment of freedom, sown in the *there-and-then*, is caught up and realized in the abiding presence of the resurrected body of Jesus."[102]

Indeed, as Copeland says, "Jesus inserted his body into the tension between resistance and desire."[103] The white women described in the introduction to this chapter belonged to an intense and short-lived interracial coalition of civil rights workers that some, with Dr. King, called a "beloved community." The members of this beloved community did not merely think about how things could be different; inserting their bodies into the struggle, they lived something different. Their actions were proleptic, prophetic. In Christian terms, this was an experience of the Reign of God, the mystical body of Christ realized here and now. In our own time, we too can attempt to image God by inserting our bodies where we know we need to be, for our sake and the sake of those around us.

The fight for liberation, the struggle against suffering and injustice, will not be won in our lifetimes. Moreover, as the multiplying theological exhortations to solidarity reveal, white people bear the additional handicap of having to convince ourselves that we ought to participate in this struggle. In demanding that we face the reality of black women's suffering, Copeland pushes us to declare that God wants no one to suffer—not even Jesus—and to put that knowledge into action.

Insisting that we remember our past and be mindful of our present, a commitment to solidarity urges us inexorably toward the Resurrection. "In [Jesus's] raised body, a compassionate God interrupts the structures of death and sin, of violation and oppression."[104] A God worthy of our worship, the God who sent us Jesus, cannot both sanction and interrupt these structures. The usefulness in passing on the story of the cross[105] is in remembering and honoring the pain of one of our own, who stayed with us to the end, and in our own commitment to oppose suffering wherever it occurs. In Copeland's words,

> Eucharistic solidarity orients us to the cross of the lynched Jesus of Nazareth, where we grasp the enormity of suffering, affliction,

> and oppression as well as apprehend our complicity in the suffering, affliction, and oppression of others...In our presence, the Son of Man gathers up the remnants of our memories, the broken fragments of our histories, and judges, blesses, and transforms them. His Eucharistic banquet re-orders us, re-members us, restores us, and makes us one.[106]

When we stand shoulder to shoulder against the forces of empire, when we alleviate or prevent suffering, when we say “no more” with our bodies, we do it with, for, and in the name of Jesus.[107]

8

Dismantling Evil: Emilie M. Townes

With the nomination and election of the first African American president of the United States in 2008,[1] some social commentators—professional and amateur, mostly white—proclaimed the advent of a "post-racial era." By this they seemed to mean that most white people have realized that we ought not to discriminate based on race. John McWhorter, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute and himself African American, declared the day after the election that racism is "no longer our *main* problem."[2] "Sure, there are racists," McWhorter shrugs. "There are also rust and mosquitoes, and there always will be. Life goes on." Noting that, for example, the Congressional Black Caucus collaborated in the legislation that mandates stiffer penalties for possession of crack than powdered cocaine, which has resulted in more jail time for black offenders, he rejects the idea that racism still shapes the structures of U.S. society.

By itself, however, President Obama's election did virtually nothing to alter the persistence of structural inequality in the United States. Following the election, we saw no evidence that police had suddenly ceased to stop African American drivers more often than white drivers; that African Americans had begun to receive mortgage loan interest rates equal to, rather than higher than, those offered to their equally qualified white counterparts; that the criminal system had begun to prosecute and imprison African Americans at the same rates as whites, or to hand down sentences for African Americans that were no more punitive than those assigned to whites; or that African Americans were receiving employment consideration equal to whites with identical qualifications. It took more than four years and a judge to declare that at least some of the destruction and suffering caused by Hurricane Katrina was the direct result of decades of shoddy work

10.1057/9780230114715 - Racism and the Image of God, Karen Teel

on the part of the Army Corps of Engineers—not, as much of white America had assumed, the fault of the mostly African American, mostly working-class residents of the city of New Orleans.[3] And all of this is to say nothing of the experiences of Latino/as, Asians, or Native Americans in the United States. At best, it is historically inaccurate to discount the role of race in the inequalities that remain embedded in U.S. society; at worst, it is irresponsible and dangerous.

What does the election of an African American president mean, then? While we have not conquered racism, it may nevertheless—as commentators like McWhorter suggest—signal a positive shift in white U.S. culture. The fact that many European Americans voted for an African American candidate may indicate that we know that we ought not to discriminate according to race, so that when the possibility of race influencing our actions is so evident to us that we cannot possibly ignore it, we are capable of making the right choice. But voting in a presidential election is such a special case that it cannot assure us that we will not continue, in our everyday lives, to act consciously or unconsciously on persistent racial stereotypes. If we think that by acknowledging that one African American may be exceptional, even superior to ourselves, we have permanently overcome these stereotypes, then our collective presidential vote for Barack Obama has only tricked us into a more subtle blindness.

Rather than signaling a "post-racial" era, the election of our first president of color is, at most, a milestone still close to the beginning of a long, hard road to racial recovery. How can so many deny this when the evidence is right in front of us? This question is not merely rhetorical, for declaring that racism is passé sanctions the continuation of structural violence against people of color by pretending the problem is solved.

As the previous chapter suggests, the ways in which we know and refuse to know may be examined; we can widen our horizons of knowledge to admit information of which we have been, perhaps willfully, ignorant. Womanist ethicist Emilie M. Townes offers concrete strategies we can use to counteract our ignorance. Drawing our attention to ways in which black bodies in the United States are ailing as a result of centuries of hegemonic structural violence, she insists that in order to alter this situation, both black and white people need to change our attitudes and our behaviors. Moving from lament to hope,[4] she subverts negative stereotypes of black people, especially black women, through the practice of countermemory, which white people may be able to utilize as well. These ethical strategies contribute to the fashioning of a theological method by which we may become able to recognize all human bodies as the image of God.

The Ailing Black Body

Ever since slavery, African Americans have remained an underclass in U.S. society.[5] For Townes, slavery, lynching, segregation and racism, health-care failures including the Tuskegee syphilis experiment, the HIV/AIDS crisis, and the availability of drugs to the black community reveal that the dominant attitude of the United States toward African Americans has been genocidal. Some of these phenomena represent a trajectory of actual genocide, and in other cases, perhaps only perceived genocide. In any case, naming these tragedies—voicing a communal lament—is the first step toward understanding and transforming them.[6] Her accounts of lynching, the Tuskegee syphilis experiment, and the black body as cultural icon, including the difficulty of being a black female body "in a dominating culture,"[7] offer particular insight into the mistreatment of black bodies in the United States.

First, lynching, which was an ongoing practice long after Reconstruction, was clearly genocidal. Under U.S. law, killing a black person was not a crime. A quick perusal of the titles of newspaper accounts of lynchings from 1880 to 1960 shows that black people often were killed on hearsay and conjecture, without proof; rape and poisoning were common accusations; and lynchers often killed someone other than the supposed criminal, with no repercussions.[8] African Americans could not count on the government to protect them. This holds in large measure today; hate crimes, as well as the location and disguising of toxic waste landfills near black communities, function as contemporary continuations of lynching.[9] Moreover, the disproportionate prosecution and incarceration of African Americans effectively removes huge numbers of people from the black community. According to the 2000 national census, African Americans make up about 13 percent of the U.S. population and whites about 77 percent. Yet, as of 2008, African Americans make up 38 percent of U.S. state and federal prisoners; the United States incarcerates more than six times as many black men as white men and about three times as many black women as white women.[10] All of this contributes to an environment in which wariness of state authority still plays a rational and important role among African Americans.

10.1057/9780230114715 - Racism and the Image of God, Karen Teel

Second, the Tuskegee syphilis experiment greatly undermined African Americans' trust in the health-care system.[11] In this experiment, which lasted from 1932 to 1972, black men who were unaware they had syphilis were left untreated so the medical establishment could observe the disease's effects on their bodies. Though this experiment was widely known in the medical community while it was going on, it elicited almost no rebukes.[12] Only when the experiment was exposed to the wider society was it stopped. This is shocking but not surprising given the beliefs white doctors held about black people. Historian Edward H. Beardsley explains,

> Until the early twentieth century most white doctors believed, as had their ante-bellum counterparts, that blacks were biologically inferior and subject to a different pathology from that governing whites. Further, they regarded blacks as psychologically unfit for freedom and for the most part uneducable in the ways of better hygiene. Among many white doctors, the thinking was that it was futile even to try to rescue black health.[13]

While Beardsley's timeline indicates that some white doctors may have overcome this general belief by the time of the Tuskegee syphilis experiment, the experiment shows that they still lacked a basic respect for black bodies. Townes asserts that "the absolute value became knowledge, not human lives.... [R]ather than being a noble and valuable study, the experiment was a tribute to inhumanity, bad medicine, and flawed scientific methods."[14] Given this haunting memory, the fear of government or medical conspiracy in promoting HIV/AIDS, which disproportionately affects African Americans, and the availability of and crackdown on drugs in black urban areas while most dealers and users in the United States are white, it is no surprise that African Americans tend to view the government and the health-care system with suspicion.

Third, the black body functions as cultural icon. Since slavery, white society has displayed and experimented with black bodies without their consent.[15] Though she never visited the United States, many black scholars discuss the complicated and tragic case of Saartjie Baartman, a nineteenth-century African woman who was displayed as a curiosity all over Europe, and whose genitals, brain, and skeleton were preserved after her death at age twenty-five. Baartman's body remained on museum display in this manner until the 1970s, and only in 2002 did France return her remains to South Africa for burial. The European fascination with black women's supposedly oversexed bodies was mirrored in the incipient United States. Townes critiques erroneous and persistent white perceptions of black sexuality, including the idea that black women are all either asexual ("mammy") or oversexed ("Jezebel") and that black men are natural rapists. Townes also assesses white society's invention of Aunt Jemima for marketing purposes—pancake mix, syrup, and so on—and of the myths of Mammy, Sapphire, the Tragic Mulatta, and Topsy to justify demeaning attitudes toward black women.[16] In these ways and more, white society has dehumanized black people.

Whites have framed the black body as a sexual icon; ironically, we project our own desires onto this icon while remaining sexually repressed despite our own prolific sexual activity.[17] Townes states, "The reality of Black bodies as icons points the way to the fact that this is a sexually repressive culture although the media, the church, and even our personal observations may indicate that we are promiscuous."[18] Often, African Americans internalize this dehumanization. Like Kelly Brown Douglas and Marcia Riggs, Townes laments the fact that members of the black community have a difficult time initiating reasonable discussions about their sexuality because such discussions reinforce the white community's illusion that black people are obsessed with sex.[19] The result is a dangerous silence about HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, homophobia and heterosexism, and sexual double standards for males and females.

Altogether, Townes shows that despite the political gains of the civil rights movement, black bodies in the United States have always been and still are ailing. African Americans cannot trust society or government to act in their best interests; to the contrary, they can expect their well-being to be thwarted. From the infant mortality rate (2.3 times higher for black babies than for white babies)[20] to the fact that black people's life spans average several years shorter than their white counterparts; from slavery, lynching, segregation, and the Tuskegee experiment to the AIDS crisis, the drug crisis, and unhealthy sexual attitudes, African Americans suffer disproportionately and unnecessarily. These are ethical issues about which all Christians ought to be concerned—socially, politically, ecclesiologically, and theologically.

The Cultural Production of Evil

Evil is not too strong a word to describe this desperate situation. For Townes, evil is produced by societies or cultures; it is generated by what she calls the "fantastic hegemonic imagination." Often, though not always, the U.S. manifestation of this imagination constructs distorted views of African Americans. It has created and perpetuated the ailing status of the black body.

What does it mean to describe imagination as fantastic and hegemonic? First, drawing upon the work of Michel Foucault, Townes argues that the imagination of Americans, especially European Americans, is fantastic. Through our use of the fantastic, we attempt to make sense of events we do not understand, questioning what appears odd or supernatural to us but may seem normal to others. Because we think we know everything (or at least more than everyone else), we sometimes reject common-sense explanations for phenomena unfamiliar to us—for example, differing cultural norms. In using this imagination we are circumscribed, often unknowingly, by "structures of domination and subordination," such that our interpretations of such events are flawed or simply wrong.[21] They are fantastic.

Second, following Antonio Gramsci, Townes defines hegemony as "the set of ideas that dominant groups employ in a society to secure the consent of subordinates to abide by their rule."[22] The fantastic hegemonic imagination typically perceives only one right way to do or understand anything. This imagination creates false histories and justifications for whatever story seems most beneficial to the teller, regardless of facts that contradict this narrative. One prominent example is President George W. Bush's handling of the war in Iraq: Townes observes that this war was undertaken under false pretenses and prosecuted with no satisfactory victory plan or exit strategy, yet President Bush and his advisors insisted that the war was justified, necessary, and a success.[23] This fantastic hegemonic imagination has created and perpetuated sinister myths about the black community in the United States, particularly about black women and black sexuality. U.S. culture produces evil in its attitudes toward and treatment of particular people and groups, inside and outside the United States. In exploring the evil cultural productions of the fantastic hegemonic imagination, Townes investigates not only the detrimental effects of these stereotypes on the black community, but also the interior life of the evil that perpetuates them as well as how this evil is produced. She aims to expose and begin to dismantle the cultural production of evil.

One important factor is the existence of uninterrogated coloredness. With this phrase, Townes names the tendency of European

Americans not to think of ourselves as belonging to a specific race or culture.[24] We think we are simply normal, while "racial" or "ethnic" groups such as African Americans deviate from this norm. Many of us are unaware that whiteness itself is a subject of study. For example, Townes highlights the work of Ruth Frankenberg, whose 1980s study of the "social construction of whiteness" aimed to establish race as a factor in white women's lives: "To speak of whiteness is, I think, to assign *everyone* a place in the relations of racism."[25] To date, too few white people understand our place. Moreover, citing Toni Morrison, Townes reminds us that it is European Americans who are now declaring that race does not exist. It is no coincidence that we are doing this just when people of color, after resisting the concept for centuries, have begun to reframe it in positive terms.[26]

Indeed, this idea of race was originally constructed by people of European descent who used it to justify slavery. Following their lead, we tend to think of race as referring to physical features such as skin color, hair type, and eye shape that distinguish various groups. But in fact, Townes notes, "color is the least rigorous [scientific] way to determine race."[27] Biologically and genetically, physical characteristics are the least reliable markers of racial difference.[28] Social scientists generally agree that race is socially, politically, and culturally constructed.[29] Townes explains, "As a fixed immutable category—no, race does not exist. As a relational process of shifting boundaries and social meanings constantly engaged in political struggles—yes, race does exist."[30] While race is not a stable biological phenomenon, it is a social reality. It informs our everyday interactions in the United States. "Whiteness as a social construction," then, is dangerously underexamined: it is uninterrogated coloredness.[31]

Townes notes that only three books have been written on white privilege and racism by white Christian ethicists since 1968. This is troubling, especially in light of the many books on environmental, feminist, and postmodern ethics. In theology (as distinct from ethics), the most significant single-author book to date is James W. Perkinson's *White Theology*, which investigates "the inability to account for whiteness in all of its continuing organization of privilege, power and property"—what Townes calls "uninterrogated coloredness"—as a theological problem.[32] These and other thinkers agree that white Christians, especially scholars, must learn to interrogate our coloredness if we are to oppose racism effectively.

Townes suggests we obey this ethical imperative by exercising the "womanist dancing mind." The notion of the dancing mind comes from Toni Morrison, for whom it symbolizes the freedom of thinkers to seek truth and exchange ideas unimpeded by danger such as hostile government censure.[33] The womanist dancing mind does not pretend to objectivity as neutrality, which, drawing on W.E.B. Du Bois, Townes declares to be impossible.[34] Instead, the womanist dancing mind understands objectivity as a relentless search for truth. It is the desire to know what is the case, rather than the desire to know only what makes us feel good about ourselves.

For Townes, objectivity begins by focusing on particularity, not to essentialize but to employ a certain epistemology. Black women's experiences provide a critical window into the interior life of evil and how it is produced and operates in our culture.[35] Of course, focusing on particularity as a starting point is not unique. For example, Traci C. West, a black feminist ethicist, listens to real women's stories as a crucial resource for strategies of resistance to oppression.[36] Many liberation theologies, including feminist theologies and Latin American liberation theologies, also privilege human experiences to encourage a particular mode of knowing.

To begin, Townes considers several stereotypes of black femaleness that have been household words in the United States: Aunt Jemima, Sapphire, Mammy and her modern counterpart the Welfare Queen, the Tragic Mulatta, and Topsy. Particularly instructive for European Americans is Sapphire, who

> began as a joke in plays and minstrel music shows. She was smaller than Mammy and Aunt Jemima, but stout. She had medium to dark brown complexion, and she was headstrong and opinionated. She was loud-mouthed, strong-willed, sassy, and practical. The Sapphire stereotype made her husband look inferior, and in doing so, her image set detrimental standards for the Black family.[37]

This stereotype appears—and was intended to be—thoroughly negative. Sapphire is a creation of the fantastic hegemonic imagination, adopted by whites and blacks alike. But reread with countermemory, she can also subvert that imagination. Black women's strength and determination have enabled the black community to survive, and Sapphire's no-nonsense, practical, loud-mouthed, opinionated truth-telling is exactly what we need to expose the evil notions produced by the fantastic hegemonic imagination—here, uninterrogated coloredness.

10.1057/9780230114715 - Racism and the Image of God, Karen Teel

Revisiting these stereotypes, then, can help us unpack the history of dehumanization of black femaleness and subvert these death-dealing narratives.[38] For Townes,

> [These reimagined stereotypes] unsettle and disrupt notions of identity as property, uninterrogated coloredness, reparations and empire, religious values in public policymaking, and solidarity. They challenge the images of the fantastic imagination that celebrate noxious stereotypes of Black women, children, and men. They also provide an alternative and more creative or "real" space to better understand who we are in our diversity. Rather than assume that such knowledge will destroy our ways of living, it offers the possibility that they will, in fact, enhance our lives—all our lives. It is to *begin* the work of dismantl*ing* evil.[39]

Invoking the countermemory of Sapphire, Townes demands that we cease to privilege platitudes and myths over the difficult realities of racism in our history and contemporary culture. Sapphire will not allow us to go on pretending that everything is all right.

Dismantling the Cultural Production of Evil

The ailing black body is a cultural production of the fantastic hegemonic imagination. Inventing stereotypes and false narratives has allowed European Americans to believe that our prejudices against people of color are warranted. This fantastic hegemonic imagination has also infiltrated the minds of people of color; in the black community, it has fostered intragroup discriminations including sexism and heterosexism.[40] Townes warns the black community to "make no mistake about what sexism and heterosexism do to the soul and spirit. For much of what spawns the ability to commit violence to a physical body or to view the body as sexual icon is also that which holds racism and classism in place."[41] White culture has thwarted black health on all levels.

Townes emphasizes the importance of communal spirituality and health care for black survival and flourishing. Black people need to take charge of their own self-identification and begin to figure out who they really are, discarding white-originated stereotypes. They must learn to love their own flesh, as Baby Suggs encourages them to do.[42] And white people must interrogate our coloredness so we can recognize and work to change the social dynamics we perpetuate, often unknowingly. These tasks are complex, for the body is both personal and communal.[43] Yet, fortified with accurate knowledge, we may be able to take action for justice.

Dismantling Evil in the African American Community

Calling black people to work together for justice, Townes warns that American society encourages individualism, and the black community will fracture if it succumbs to that tendency. The only hope is to "confront" injustice—to face it together.[44] Black people must resist both stereotyping—believing what others say about them—and succumbing to the rhetoric of victimization. Communal lament, or accurately naming the problems facing the black community, is only the first step toward strategizing ways of dealing with these problems.[45] For example, Townes describes encountering resistance from black people when she reported at a conference that black and Hispanic people are disproportionately afflicted with HIV/AIDS.[46] She found that her audience was more concerned with the misperception that gay men represent the majority of those infected, and the detrimental effect of this misperception on the black community, than with fact that intravenous drug use accounts for many cases. Townes asserts that this kind of willful ignorance, which in her own later hermeneutic might be called a cultural production of the fantastic hegemonic imagination, will get the black community nowhere. In contrast, she lifts up black women's clubs, which flourished in the nineteenth and early twentieth century under leaders such as Ida B. Wells-Barnett, as a historical manifestation of black people's ability to work together toward common goals.[47]

Throughout her work, Townes emphasizes that human beings—women and men, white and black, violent and violated, healthy and sick—are not all the same.[48] We are equal in human dignity, but our needs vary depending on our circumstances.[49] Summing up the problems already mentioned—Tuskegee, HIV/AIDS, toxic waste dumps, drugs, prisons, infant mortality rates, life expectancies—Townes advocates attention to the health-care system in the United States. This is the only developed country besides South Africa that does not provide health care to all its citizens. While this hurts all of us,[50] for African Americans the constant stress of dealing with racism leads to and exacerbates various health problems. Racism affects bodily health even when the violence is not overtly physical; it not only kills through the occasional hate crime, but also causes premature death in many more subtle ways. Even so, African Americans receive poorer health care than European Americans, often lacking access entirely.[51]

Generally speaking, Townes argues for a realistic allocation of resources within the black community. She does not expend a lot of energy trying to "rescue the killers"; instead, she puts her efforts toward standing in solidarity with victims and working for justice.[52] This is a refreshingly pragmatic acknowledgement that since we cannot possibly help everyone, redeeming the perpetrators of violence should take second place to rehabilitating victims. Yet Townes does not only blame white racism for black people's problems; she also identifies issues that black people need to address themselves. Noting that U.S. residents generally have poor diets, Townes criticizes the largely unhealthy "soul food" tradition, which contributes to many black people's ill health.[53] She also critiques colorism—the idea that lighter-skinned people are smarter or somehow more valuable than darker-skinned people—in the black community.[54] The fact that this idea originated in slavery does not mean black people have no responsibility to correct its infiltration of their own thinking. Refusing to oversimplify these matters, Townes insists, "We have been both victims and victimizer."[55] All problems affecting the black community need attention.

While Townes's assertion that she will not "rescue the killers" may strike some as harsh, it is tempered by her awareness that oppression hurts oppressors as well. As outlined below, she devotes some energy to proposing strategies for white people to interrogate our coloredness. Here is no simple claim that whiteness is bad and blackness is good. In different ways, we all exercise the fantastic hegemonic imagination; we all participate in the cultural production of evil. Obviously, however, European Americans have more to regret and more work to do.

Dismantling Evil in the European American Community

Townes prescribes that European Americans begin by interrogating our own coloredness. We need a drastic shift in consciousness to stop thinking of ourselves as "normal" and everyone else as "ethnic." We have a culture, and many elements of it are sinister. Both Townes and Perkinson push us to interrogate our coloredness, discover the content of our culture, and voice our own lament about our past and present sins. They argue that, upon reflection, we will see that white culture has negative content because it is built on what whites are not: not-black, not-Hispanic/Latino/a, not-Native, not-Asian. Further, some people now considered white, such as Italians, Irish, and Poles, have cultures that have positive content but are also infected with white racism.

Whiteness is a complex phenomenon, but it originally developed out of “a cultivated contempt for Blacks and indigenous peoples.”[56] To put it mildly, this is a poor foundation for honest self-understanding or for interacting respectfully with others.

How may white Americans, especially theologians and ethicists, begin to unpack our uninterrogated coloredness? Townes offers some specific guidelines, directing us to “take up the challenges that racism and uninterrogated [coloredness] present despite the fact that it will hurt. It might cause some guilt.”[57] This hurt and guilt should push us forward rather than paralyzing us. Likewise, Bonilla-Silva suggests that “good people who subscribe to . . . the frames of color blindness” and who feel guilty about their complicity in racist structures should undertake “a personal and political movement away from claiming to be ‘nonracist’ to becoming ‘antiracist.’ ”[58] Townes exhorts us to stop trying to be perfect and commit ourselves to an antiracist practice we can exercise every day. She admonishes us to stop collapsing race into color, the least rigorous way to differentiate among people. She demands that we consider our social location and resist our individualistic tendencies. She stresses that community is essential to antiracist work, and she reminds us to be humble—to be willing to change, to honestly confront our roles in perpetuating racist structures. Finally, she says,

> you must give yourself permission to be tired and weary, besides, you must also find ways of renewal so that you can be a creative and healthy participant in dismantling oppressions. Burned out, bitter people do not help bring in justice very often and they are of little help in any search for [T]ruth.[59]

With these guidelines, Townes generously offers strategies for beginning to combat racism and our own uninterrogated coloredness, both in our scholarship and in our day-to-day lives.

If we want to support the transition of victims to nonvictimhood, we first must cease to be victimizers. This is not easy, because while it is usually obvious to victims of oppression when harm has taken place, oppressors’ perception of violence is not so straightforward. Typically, white people think of slavery and its depraved attitudes as ancient history; we fail to understand or even see our supporting role in the contemporary cultural production and perpetuation of evil. Our willful ignorance leads us to speak nobly about our desire to help victims as though they have been harmed by some pernicious, unseen force rather than by ourselves and our own prejudices. We forget that we have participated in this violence; more often, we never admit it in the first place. As a case in point, consider the slogan that some conservative Christians began to print on T-shirts and bumper stickers about a year after President Obama's election: "Pray for Obama (Psalm 109:8)." The referenced verse expresses the psalmist's wish that the current ruler's days in office be few. The creator of the slogan maintained that it was intended to convey her hope that President Obama would be voted out of office after serving only one term; she claimed to have been unaware that the verse directly following this one reads, "May his children be orphans, and his wife a widow."[60] Can it be possible that this woman was really oblivious to the appalling implications of her action? How can such a claim have any credibility? With her unpacking of the fantastic hegemonic imagination, Townes gives us a framework with which to comprehend this incident.

Having learned to recognize such problems, we can begin to spot them in ourselves. Here are three memories of my own: my grandmother, in California, explaining that she was discarding the outermost leaves of a head of lettuce she had already washed because the Mexican migrant workers had touched it with their "dirty hands"; my parents, in their condominium in Hawaii, bemoaning what they saw as the substandard work ethic of the native Hawaiians on the maintenance staff; and myself, some years ago, avoiding physical contact with a friendly street musician who happened to be black. When questioned, comments and actions like these are often explained away. My grandmother might have said, had I asked, that she didn't mean that migrant workers were dirty but that their hands were because they worked in the fields; my parents might have argued, had I asked, that they were not making a racist judgment but observing a cultural difference; and I tried to convince myself, when I thought about it, that I was simply a woman keeping a safe distance from a man I didn't know. But when I face these memories honestly, my gut tells me that in each case, race played a significant role, and I have no doubt that this role would have been perfectly transparent to our victims, even if it was invisible to us unintentional racists. Further, acknowledging these events collectively prompts the uncomfortable realization that they are not isolated cases: when I add them together, an intergenerational pattern emerges.

Can such memories be healed? This question may be premature. We have to work, first, on remembering such events at all, on recognizing the pattern. For every racist incident I have been involved in that I remember and understand today, I have undoubtedly forgotten or failed to notice many others. It requires effort for me to remember the events I have described. They make me feel guilty and ashamed. I would rather forget them. Indeed, because I am not a victim but an oppressor, I can, if I choose, ignore the ways in which my own attitudes damage others and myself. I can easily forget, because there is no obvious cost to me for doing so. It takes determination to analyze these memories and sit with the discomfort they bring. It takes humility to face the people we have harmed through our omissions and commissions and to allow ourselves to be convicted by their pain. It takes courage not to mistake profuse apologies for gritting our teeth and facing up to our sins. While we need not take on the guilt of our ancestors for slavery, we have inherited its legacy and we are responsible to its effects. If we aspire to solidarity with people of color, we have to face our memories and actions honestly.

Insofar as structural violence continues today in incidents like these, we are unwitting perpetrators or at least accomplices. We need a theology that compels us, the oppressors—as both perpetrators and accomplices—to unearth our shameful memories, to hold them up to the light and face them for what they are, to live with the discomfort they cause, knowing that this dis-ease is nothing compared to the harm these events have done to our victims. We need a concrete strategy for seeing, remembering, and understanding. Moreover, we must learn to recognize such episodes while they are happening so that we can begin to creatively interrupt the cycle. And, as the previous chapter has argued, we need to come to terms with this largely on our own, remembering Alice Walker's caution that a womanist is "not a separatist, except periodically, for health."[61] The people we have harmed already have to live with what we have done to them; even if they have worked through it, it is egregiously unfair to ask them to educate us about what we've done and hold our hands as we face up, painfully, to our own culpability. Before we can join in solidarity with our victims, we have got do some hard work on ourselves. Perhaps hardest to accept, the world we have known will not congratulate us for it.

One way to begin this work may be to adopt Townes's strategy of countermemory to understand the violence in our everyday lives. Townes deploys this notion as a tool to subvert negative stereotypes of black women and use them to critique destructive social forces. Indeed, what white people need right now is to listen for Sapphire telling us loud and clear exactly where we are going wrong. By educating ourselves—through reading, listening, thinking, and talking to one another—we might be able to utilize Townes's tool of countermemory to open up our minds and memories, analyze events that we thought were innocuous, and start to subvert the workings of our fantastic hegemonic imaginations. In this way, we may become able, in our daily lives, to name and resist pernicious social dynamics that we did not even see before.

As a finite human being with limited energy, Townes focuses on rehabilitating the victims, not rescuing the killers. European Americans who want to join her must come to terms with our own status as oppressors. Theology, urging us toward truth, may be able to help us do that. Only then might we have a real chance at effective solidarity.

Dismantling Evil as Imaging God

After President Obama's election, John McWhorter, the Manhattan Institute analyst, rightly observed that progress has been made since the formal civil rights movement: "The very fact that it is news that there remain people who wouldn't vote for a black man shows that we live in a different world than 40 years ago."[62] Indeed. But have we come so far as he indicates? Would his judgment that racism is now only a minor problem be corroborated by most African Americans? If so, that would certainly be progress to be celebrated. But for white people striving to overcome racist attitudes that severely distort our own and others' humanity, McWhorter's declaration that racism occurs merely within individual psyches—*our* psyches—downplays a situation that still has a great deal of urgency. He is probably correct that the goal of completely eliminating individual racism is a "utopian pipe dream"—though I prefer the term "ideal." Even so, this is no reason not to try to make some improvement. Racism is often aptly likened to a disease, and if you are diagnosed with a disease that is often terminal, but you have a chance to beat it, you fight.

Townes's work shows, on yet another level, that white Christianity and white Christians have not done enough to combat racism. On the contrary, insofar as we have supported practices that contribute to the ailing status of the black body, we have engaged in the cultural production of evil. Townes's womanist ethics displays an unflagging faithfulness not to a specific discipline or a particular group of people but to the truth of the matter,[63] a commitment that is deeply theological. She expands our vision of the image of God, pushing the boundaries of Christian theological anthropology, so that we are compelled to undertake antiracist work in ourselves, our churches, and our society. Of the many resources in Townes's work, here I highlight four.

First, just as Townes applies countermemory to the stereotypes of Aunt Jemima, the Welfare Queen, Sapphire, the Tragic Mulatta, and Topsy to expose the inner workings of the fantastic hegemonic imagination, white Christians—especially theologians—can utilize countermemory to critically understand ourselves, our society, our churches, and our theologies. In the past, theologians have considered racial and sexual differences to be an obstacle to identifying the essence of the image of God and have used them to rank people as more or less similar to God. But with the knowledge that "racial" characteristics are not reliable ways to distinguish between groups, we can use countermemory to critique our negative reactions to such differences and to reenvision them precisely as evidence of God's image beautifully and equally manifested in all the peoples of the earth. Our theological warrant here is the doctrine of the Trinity, differentiation within the divine itself.[64] In doing this work, we might even be exercising the womanist dancing mind.

Second, although Townes does not often mention this idea explicitly, underlying her work is an acute awareness that everything we do and are, everything about human life, is "mediated through our bodies."[65] With this phrase, Townes apparently intends to resist the Cartesian dualism that characterizes European thinking and has been imposed on us all. She also invokes the example of Jesus, in whom God takes on human personhood, including a human body, and the sacraments of Christian churches, which are acted out through, on, and in human bodies. Justice must be for the whole person, and it must be concrete. Townes reminds us, "[I]n its advocacy for relationality, womanist spirituality must take care that relationality itself does not slip into the miasma of abstractions. This will lead womanist spirituality down the path of weak ethical reflection and practice."[66] While the phrase "mediated through our bodies" still betrays the limitations of language in attempting to speak of the human person as a whole—soul, mind, body—it may nevertheless be helpful as we work to integrate the body into our understanding of the fullness of human personhood as created in the image of God.

Third, Townes's portrayal of the African American body as ailing furthers the quest to define the body as part of the image of God. If the body is created in the image of God, and if Townes is correct that the black body is ailing in comparison to other bodies (white bodies in particular), then anyone and any cultural practice that contributes to this ailing condition dishonors God's image in African Americans. White Christians, whose faith has been implicated in some of these practices, face an ethical imperative to become aware of our own relation to them and to work to end or transform them on the grounds that black people are created in God's image. Here a theological assertion, "Black people are made in the image of God," gives rise to an ethical imperative, "Black bodies must be respected as made in the image of God," and leads directly to concrete action for justice in society, "How can my social group and I better respect and advocate for the health and dignity of black people?"

Fourth, in a move that encourages action for justice, Townes insists that paradise is not only something to look forward to in the next life, but also something to strive for here.[67] This is not merely a spiritual paradise; it is a world in which everyone has enough to eat, good health care, equal access to decent work and pay, and the freedom to live without fear—in other words, a world in which no one is ailing. If such a paradise is to be "post-racial," this must mean not that everyone becomes the same, but that we will honor and celebrate our differences rather than fearing them. While maintaining an intensely realistic attitude, Townes maintains that all people must strive toward this ideal. And to make progress, we must not despair. We must move from lament—accurately naming our roles in oppression and deconstructing our fantastic hegemonic imaginations—to hope, to working for justice. In doing so, we commit ourselves to dismantle the evil that all of us have helped to produce.

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9

One Body at a Time

When our church's new crucifix—a glowing ebony Christ on a beautiful wooden cross—was unveiled, the largely African American congregation murmured and nodded with approval, admiration and gratitude. Like all Christians, black Catholics need to see themselves in Christ, in the body Christians love, worship, and seek to imitate above all others. The black Christ embodies their hopes, their striving, and their salvation. He shows them, as nothing else can, that they are made in the image of God.

This black Christ is also important to me. As a white Christian, gazing upon this crucifix reminds me of my own place in church, society, and world. By his very presence, this Christ calls me to repent my role in our history and the roles of people like me, and to undertake the hard work of doing whatever I can to advance the well-being of people of color, which may sometimes occur at my expense. Yet even as I mourn and rage against our white failings, I rejoice with my fellow Christians, black Christians, in their people's survival and flourishing against all odds. Their tenaciousness, their resurrection hope is infectious. It testifies to the glory of the human race, a race to which, in the end, we all belong. The black Christ, then, calls white Christians to both repentance and celebration.

Contemplating the black Christ, what do we repent? Throughout our history, European Americans have ranked people's ability to image God according to apparent differences among human bodies. Devaluing some bodies, we fail to respect the image of God in them and deface it in ourselves. Katie Cannon, Delores Williams, Kelly Brown Douglas, Shawn Copeland, and Emilie Townes have shown that some Christian ideas have hindered black women's flourishing as human persons created in God's image, even as others have helped them survive. Unacceptably, this is still happening in society and churches.

Contemplating the black Christ, what do we celebrate? Even while exposing Christianity's weaknesses, each of these thinkers claims it as her faith tradition and as integral to her people's resistance of oppression. Cannon shows how black people have created their own ethical system based on their assurance that God is on their side and champions their liberation; Williams focuses on Jesus's healing and preaching ministry as salvific, indicating God's desire for human survival and wholeness; Douglas highlights the sacredness of the body as central to a black sexual discourse of resistance; Copeland demonstrates how the marked body of Jesus directs us to solidarity with marked bodies in our own time; Townes frames her lament about the ailing black body in the context of the prophet Joel. Resources at the heart of Christianity have supported black people's flourishing, even as white people have twisted Christianity to justify oppressing them. If Christianity, despite its failings, has achieved all these good things, then perhaps Christian theological anthropology may be transformed to compel Christians to respect all human bodies as created in God's image.

Indeed, the five thinkers we have considered have already begun this work. While all their analyses demonstrate the need for an active respect for human bodies as sacred, Cannon and Douglas articulate the link with *imago dei* most explicitly. Cannon's historical and ethical perspective shows that a positive view of bodies is crucial to transforming negative attitudes toward black women in U.S. society and churches; she claims *imago dei* as a central Christian doctrine that is vital for black women in a hostile society.[1] Likewise, Douglas retrieves the Christian theology of the body, asserting that God's embodiment in Jesus affirms the Genesis account of the goodness of the body as created *imago dei*.[2] All five thinkers' focus on the suffering of black bodies gives rise to an ethical imperative to respect every body as sacred. We can begin to do this by recognizing all bodies as both bearing and striving to enact God's image.

If white Christians took this idea that the body is the image of God seriously, how might our behavior change? Articulating his sudden insight that every person bore a divine spark, Thomas Merton exclaimed, "There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun."[3] What if we could teach our children to see God in bodies different from their own, rather than to fear them? Pondering the black Christ on the cross, remembering that it was this victim of injustice whom God raised from the dead, how might we learn to see people who are not privileged like us? Would we begin to find our salvation in opposing their suffering?

This final chapter weaves together some of the insights gleaned from the thinkers considered in the previous five chapters. I do this rather briefly, not to draw any exhaustive comparisons or conclusions, but to argue for three basic insights generated by their work. First, every body is the image of God; second, every body can and should enact the image of God; and third, attempting solidarity with one another to oppose suffering may be the most difficult and the most important work we can undertake. These insights should ground a contemporary theological anthropology that aims to inspire Christians to act for justice.

Bodies Are the Image of God

The traditional view of the image of God as soul or mind has failed to challenge racism and related ills that plague our society and churches. As it stands, we cannot expect white Christianity to orient its believers toward justice. Unless we recognize that human bodies in all shapes, colors, and sizes are the image of God, we risk continuing to discriminate against one another on the basis of bodily differences. For the time being at least, we need to put aside the quest for one specific human characteristic—mental, physical, or spiritual—that signals the image of God.

Every person has a body, and the body is more than one characteristic among others: it constitutes us as human. In the Genesis creation narratives, God's "very good" applies to bodies as well as spirits—indeed, in the second story, physical bodies come first and the enlivening breath of God second. Having a body makes relationality—often cited as foundational to personhood—possible. Cannon's phrase "embodied social location," Townes's "mediated through our bodies," and Copeland's naming the body as the "site and mediation of divine revelation" indicate that our bodies function to establish our relationships, marking our places in society. But to my knowledge, no Christian theologian has yet developed a sustained argument for the body as signaling the presence of the human and therefore also the image of God.

In claiming that every person has the image of God, I mean to highlight the fact that white people have long used racial differences, perceived through skin color and other physical features, to measure human worth. Instead, however, these very differences can and should signal to us the presence of the image of God. The Incarnation, God's appearance among us as human, provides one theological warrant for this suggestion. Jesus had a body, and given his life circumstances, it is likely that he had dark skin, hair, and eyes. These features marked him as unique; no one else will ever look exactly like he did. While our uniqueness is surely more than physical, our bodies make it tangible: they constitute our humanity and our identity as the image of God. We image God precisely in our differences.

Differences among bodies should signal not only that the image of God is present, but that people image God in various, equally valid ways. This claim, in turn, is warranted by a nonhierarchical view of the Trinity: one God in three persons, equally divine but not identical to one another. Here Ian McFarland has asserted that "the distinctiveness of human beings within creation lies not in any intrinsic qualities or capacities that people share, but rather, in the differences that mark their lives under God.... [B]ecause the divine persons are identified precisely by what the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit do *not* share in common, the doctrine of the Trinity puts difference at the heart of personhood."[4] Emphasizing intangible characteristics such as relationality, however, McFarland—like other contemporary thinkers—does not highlight physical differences, perhaps the most obvious ones, as manifesting the image of God. Thomas Aquinas opined, "Multitude and distinction are not fortuitous [they do not appear by chance], but decided and wrought by the divine mind in order that divine goodness might be shadowed forth and shared in many measures. There is beauty in the very diversity."[5] On the ontological level, the fact that we each have a unique body indicates that we all share the image of God.

Bodies Enact the Image of God

Although every body has the image of God, attending to how we have historically treated one another's bodies makes clear that everyone's actions do not enact this image equally well. In other words, while every person ontologically has the image of God, and we can do nothing to change this, existentially we succeed to varying degrees in living up to it. To imagine that we can rob one another of God's image altogether is to overestimate our power, but we can cause each other to adjust how we manifest the image. Douglas clarifies this point: while every person is created in the image of God, not everyone manifests the image well—and those who fail most egregiously are oppressors, not those who are oppressed.[6]

Doubtless, there can be as many individual ways of enacting the image of God as there are people in the world. For this and other

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reasons, I have purposely avoided overly specific descriptions of how people might best image God. Given the Christian emphasis on God's love, mercy, and justice, however, it seems safe to say that acting like God should mean behaving lovingly and not cruelly, generously and not spitefully, truthfully and not dishonestly. The difficulty for white people is knowing when these things are actually happening. Here I have sought some insight into how black and white people in the United States have manifested the image. This is a risky endeavor, but it is better than making no attempt at all, which can only perpetuate the unacceptable status quo.

Cannon, Williams, Douglas, Copeland, and Townes prove that black women are always exercising their agency to seek survival and liberation, even when this struggle is hidden from white view. Not only when their oppression ceases, but in this struggle, they image God. In the United States, black female bodies have imaged God by creating and deftly utilizing an ethical system that privileges survival; by surviving the ravages of social-role surrogacy and bringing an entire people along with them; by insisting upon the liberating core of Christianity in the face of white distortion; by seeking physical, mental, and spiritual freedom against all odds; by seeing right through the lies we tell, and urging us to see through them too. Black women's struggle for survival is an ethical imperative warranted by their human identity as *imago dei*. Cannon's image of "combat breathing" illustrates graphically how black women's bodies image God.

Although, like Jesus, one can image God through one's response to suffering, no one images God simply by suffering. As Cannon points out, speaking as though suffering is a choice reveals the privilege of the speaker. Williams holds that the idea of redemptive suffering harms black women because it reinforces the idea that they should accept suffering passively.[7] Douglas shows that it is also not helpful for oppressors because it enables us to dismiss some people's suffering—suffering that we have often caused—as redemptive or "good for them." This allows us to see suffering as divinely sanctioned rather than, as Copeland urges, remembering it in order to oppose it. As Townes demonstrates by interrogating the fantastic hegemonic imagination and deploying countermemory, these tendencies both justify and occlude our role as oppressors.

Following Townes's call to interrogate our coloredness can lead us to critique our European American role as oppressors of nonwhite groups rather than making attempts to eliminate oppression that are destined to futility because we do not realize that we have caused it.

Understanding our history in this way, we may question whether white bodies have ever broadly succeeded in enacting the image of God. The ways in which we have thought we resembled God most—cultivating and exercising our power to pursue certain types of knowledge, to create massive wealth, and to "civilize" the world—have been just the opposite. Our pride in our scientific and technological advances fades when we realize that not only have they made very few people's lives substantially better, but the cost to produce them has been the death and enslavement of millions and the imperialistic domination of millions more.

So far, this may sound similar to the language I critiqued in chapter 3, noting that many European American theologians fail to recognize fully our people's historical abuse of power as well as the agency of the people we have harmed. Regarding this, I want to make three points clear. First, European Americans have disrespected the image of God in others. In some cases this has caused others to adjust the ways in which they enact the image of God, and we have also denigrated these enactments as worthless or second-rate—although destroying the *imago dei* borne ontologically by others and ourselves remains beyond our power. Second, in doing these things, we have failed to respect and enact the image of God in ourselves. Third, this failure harms us as well as our victims. While all five thinkers propel me to these conclusions, I am here most mindful of Copeland's retrieval of the mystical body of Christ: we are one family, one body by virtue of our creation by God and our relationship to Jesus. My body is my own, but it is never only my own; it is intimately connected to every body, to the earth and the cosmos. When one part of the body suffers, all suffer. To harm another person is to harm myself. This injury does not occur only remotely, to that "other" member of the body of Christ. For even if I were always able to stifle my racist thoughts, even if they never got out of my head to harm anyone else through my actions, racism would nevertheless remain a disease from which I personally suffer and of which I must strive to be healed for my own well-being, my own salvation.

Solidarity with Suffering Bodies

Our womanist mentors reveal that we have never lived in peace: Williams's investigation of surrogacy, Townes's observation that some bodies are ailing, Copeland and Cannon's observation that suffering is the ordinary state of affairs for black people make this obvious.

Douglas reminds us that there is no nonplatonized Christianity to retrieve; even Day sums up, “There is no prior conciliated state to which to return.”[8] General harmony is not a previous state that can be dusted off and reinstated. This realization makes all the more clear the exquisite absurdity of thinking we can establish solidarity simply by declaring our intention to do so.

Authentic solidarity with our brothers and sisters will be something genuinely new, and it will not arise spontaneously. We will have to work together to create it. In remembering and understanding our own complicity in racism, learning to do better, forming just relationships of solidarity, moving over and making room for all bodies to survive and thrive, white Christians too may be able to live out the image of God in our bodies. First, we need to know the truth about ourselves: we have used bodily differences to rank human worth. Only once we truly understand this discomforting and distressing reality might we be able to think about constructing authentic solidarity with those we have oppressed.

Deconstructing the Fantastic Hegemonic Imagination

White people are not intrinsically evil; as white antiracist activist Tim Wise points out, many oppressors are good people.[9] We often sense problems in our society and churches, though it can be difficult for us to figure out what is wrong. Cannon’s phrase “epistemological privilege of the oppressed” helps us to understand that we who are powerful are at a disadvantage when we try to comprehend reality. Womanist theologians, as well as the few European Americans who have begun this work, open our eyes to see and our mouths to tell our real history. Engaging these thinkers can help us to face honestly the devastation of our past and present relationships with people we have labeled “not like us.”

Learning about black women’s experiences illuminates horrifying truths about European Americans. Cannon’s critique of colorism, Williams’s depiction of the black body as receptacle, Townes’s account of the black body as ailing, Douglas’s theological exposé of white attitudes toward black bodies, and Copeland’s emphasis on tragic black suffering reveal particular modes of oppression white people have exercised on black bodies. We have used our physical characteristics to claim superiority over others. Contemporary manifestations of this problem include not only continued racism against various peoples, but also our sadly inadequate response to HIV/AIDS in Africa and our ongoing war in Iraq, where we keep exact count of American lives lost but barely approximate Iraqi deaths. We are complicit in the suffering of many.

Because we like to believe that we are good people who may make mistakes but always mean well—not to mention our fantasy that "America" has always been a benevolent force in the world—this is a difficult truth for us to recognize. Having acquired our power illegitimately, we deny its existence. Cutting through this denial requires us to accept that we did not earn everything we have. In a society where "pulling yourself up by your bootstraps" is prized above all else, this is a hard lesson. Yet womanist theologians, along with many others, remind us that the U.S. economy has been built on the labor of nonwhite bodies.[10]

Douglas shows how the "platonized" element of Christian tradition has led to dualism that enables white Christians to oppress even other Christians. As the prison chaplain says in Spike Lee's *Malcolm X*, "Everyone knows God is white." European American theologians who rely heavily on the Greek roots of Christian ideas have a special responsibility to attend to Douglas's warning that this version of Christianity is false. We always have the option to use our power to reduce suffering and empower others. Yet by convincing ourselves that we earned everything we have and ascribing others' misfortune to laziness, we close off this possibility.

When we ignore the truth that we wield oppressive power, we ignore the fact that this hurts us as much it hurts those we oppress. The question of how to help others to flourish, though well-intended, is often misguided and even selfish. Do we suspect our own experiences are not as rich as they could be if we could enjoy the fruits of others' flourishing in addition to our own? In fact, the problem is much more serious: in failing to oppose the system in which we are complicit, we reject our own calling to enact God's image. This is not to dismiss the suffering we have caused to others and our need to lament and transform that reality, but rather to emphasize again that oppressors are the ones who fail most egregiously to image God. Ignoring and perpetrating racism belies our claim to be Christians.

What should we do with our stolen power? We need to subvert it, which may mean relinquishing it to those from whom we took it. To the extent we are responsible for Christianity's failure to promote black women's physical, emotional, and spiritual health as human bodies created *imago dei*, we should defer to black women's wisdom about how we can repent and begin to do better. Cannon's black womanist ethics can show us how to subvert or ignore conventional ethical imperatives when the situation requires it. For example, white people tend to value "politeness" highly. Although politeness can make life more pleasant, the imperative to be polite all too often becomes an excuse for silence in the face of injustice—not to tell the truth so as not to offend anyone, "anyone" being a member of the dominant group. Thus, a racist comment may pass unchallenged, excused as a "saying" or a "joke."[11] But disregard for human dignity is always unacceptable. We must stop confusing politeness with truth. In her instructions for interrogating our coloredness, Townes offers a model of gracious yet resolute truth-telling. The truth may hurt, but it can sometimes be stated both politely and uncompromisingly. If not, it may still need to be spoken.

Reconstruction with Countermemory

Interrogating our coloredness, European Americans must begin to construct "color-conscious" theologies.[12] We can begin by listening to people of color about their experiences in society and churches and reflecting on our own role in them, revising our rosy vision of ourselves, and facing up to our participation in the cultural production of evil. We can also use Townes's notion of countermemory to look critically into our actions and memories for times when we have engaged in racist behavior, even unintentionally. We can do this in groups, in churches, and in society.

We cannot change history, but we can rewrite it more accurately by acknowledging our failures. For example, we might revisit the initial encounter in Africa, when Europeans judged Africans to be less than human. Reenvisioning this event, we affirm that while the two groups were different, neither was inferior in dignity. We creatively imagine that encounter as it should have been: a meeting of two cultures whose members could learn from one another. Repenting our sins and lamenting what could have been, we can put this lesson into practice by actively expecting to find God's image manifested in those whom we perceive as unlike ourselves. Without essentializing one another, we can learn to see our differences as enriching rather than threatening.

In doing this work, we need to seek out role models, not only among womanist theologians and other theologians of color, but also among white antiracist allies, both theologians and ordinary Christians.[13] White allies are especially important because we need to guard against too hastily and presumptuously claiming solidarity and integration with people of color. Following Alice Walker, we too can think of ourselves as "not…separatist, except periodically, for health."[14] Even as we proceed cautiously, we need to break down the "us/them" dichotomy. While anyone can be both oppressed and privileged, and most of us are, even womanist theologians, European Americans as a group are oppressors. And as Wise notes, it is both disrespectful and ridiculous for white people to think we can solve the problem of racism quickly if we put our minds to it, even though people of color haven't succeeded in centuries.[15] Practically speaking, there is little difference between dehumanizing people by claiming they are inferior and by claiming all the capacity and responsibility for altering their oppressed position.

Not enough white people have yet been convinced to undertake this journey, and when change is needed, many of us find it easier to hear from other whites. I once spoke on Emilie Townes's call to interrogate the fantastic hegemonic imagination to a group of mostly white scholars. Brows furrowed as the audience worked to understand the problem. I could not help but wonder if so many would have taken Townes herself as seriously had she been addressing them in my place, even though she was the expert on the topic. Given our history, it is not surprising that another white person, whose body ironically was not a visual reminder of the sins being described, would seem less threatening and more relatable to a mostly white audience. Despite the potential for continued abuse of power, therefore, we must keep talking for now.

Even as we take responsibility for creating this mess, we realize we cannot clean it up by ourselves. We need to learn about nonwhite cultures and follow the lead of people of color in establishing new directions for society and churches, remembering not to put all the burden on the people who have been our victims. White scholar James Perkinson describes this tension as "a razor's edge that must be negotiated by white people for the foreseeable future in America—a difficult but rewarding journey between the twin dangers of self-sufficient 'self-ignorance' on the one hand, and 'other-dependent' appropriation and exploitation, on the other."[16]

As we interrogate our white coloredness, we take care not to appropriate others' terminology, as many womanists request.[17] Working to understand the differences in our social locations, we mourn and rage against our roles in creating those differences. We gain respect for the agency of black women, rejoicing that they have creatively survived and thrived despite everything we have thrown at them. We remember that some have not survived and oppose the powers that still desire this outcome. We critique our religious assumptions, realizing that white Christians too need the notion of harmony Douglas proposes. We gain the motivation to oppose suffering, for in insisting that we remember the details of black suffering, Copeland pushes us also to scrutinize our role in it. We realize that our neighbor's suffering is our own. We learn not to mistake suffering for holiness. Finally, we gain the knowledge that we are not alone. We are not only "killers"—some of us have stood up for justice, and the rest of us can change our ways.

Doing this work, we move in and out of sorrow, rage, and hope. Once we overcome our apathy, we must not become calloused but maintain our anger and sadness at the reality of the situation. Leaving the familiar behind for new allegiances can be lonely, even as we experience the joy of knowing what we are doing is right.

White Christian in a Black Church

The human body may be female or male, white or black, gay or straight, physically able or challenged, but we know it when we see it. The body marks us as human. A body is either human or it is not. The Incarnation bears this out: Jesus needed a body to be human. Had he lacked a body, he would not have been less human; he would not have been human at all.

The body also marks us as the image of God. Having created bodies in God's image, God called them very good.[18] The question of how well we manifest the image is vital, but it does not change our creation in the image. This distinction can function to keep us from devaluing the humanity of any body. The goodness of the body, created in God's image, is vital to a theological anthropology that will function to compel Christians to resist racism in society and in churches. It urges us to respect all human bodies precisely in our differences.

Offering a window into the weaknesses of Christian theological anthropology, womanist theologians urge us to attend to the problems these failings have caused. If we wish to construct antiracist theologies, we must attend to womanist theology and all theologies of color. Our ability to hear and speak truth depends on our willingness to listen to the word our black sisters, as well as all oppressed people, have to say to us about our role in their dehumanization and how they have survived and thrived in spite of it. Taking their work as a starting point, we can strive toward theological antiracism. If we take this challenge seriously and begin interrogating our theologies, intending to transform them from white supremacist to antiracist, we must be prepared to reconstruct them—and our entire way of life—from the ground up.

What will it mean to be a Christian who worships a black Christ, who takes seriously the body as the image of God? Witnessing the baptism of a white baby in my black church, I wondered what would happen if we understood commitment to Christ not primarily as a spiritual event of personal salvation, but as acceptance of the challenge Jesus extends through his own example: to join in concrete acts of solidarity with suffering and ailing bodies. If following Jesus means not behaving piously once or twice a week but shaping our lives around our outrage at injustice—especially injustice in which we are complicit—then Christianity takes on a whole new meaning. That newly baptized child, her parents who agreed to raise her in the church, and the congregation who pledged to support them are charged to understand our own and others' histories, to know the joys and sufferings of many, to recognize the image of God in one another and everyone we meet.

Our bodies mark us as human. They also mark us as the image of God. Our marvelous diversity calls us to oppose suffering wherever we find it—if necessary, one precious body at a time.[19]

Notes

1 Racism as a Christian Problem

1. Hawk, "The Problem with Pagans," 154.
2. This theme is pervasive. See, for example, Ex 23:9; Dt 10:19; Is 1:16–17 (NRSV).
3. Dubois, *Slaves and Other Objects*.
4. Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, 74.
5. Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, 102.
6. For this discussion of racism, I am indebted to Tatum, *"Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?"* Chap. 1.
7. Tatum, *"Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?"* 7.
8. McIntosh's article is easily accessible online. Here I cite a print version, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," 98–99.
9. Tatum, *"Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?"* 7.
10. See Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists*.
11. Rodríguez, *Racism and God-Talk*, 27.
12. Copeland, "Enfleshing Freedom," 67.
13. See Alice Walker's foundational definition of the term "womanist" in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, xi–xii.
14. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 3.
15. For example, Katie Cannon requests that white feminist liberationists not appropriate the term "womanist." Cannon, "Not Easy," 39.
16. Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode*, 3–4; Baker-Fletcher, "A Womanist Journey," 167; Hayes, "Standing in the Shoes My Mother Made," 74.
17. Pinn, "What's the Theological Equivalent of a 'Mannish Boy'?" 279.
18. Williams, "The Color of Feminism," 51.

2 Racism as a White Problem

1. See, for example, Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness* and *Working Toward Whiteness*.
2. Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, 81.
3. For a comprehensive history of the Atlantic slave trade, see Mannix, *Black Cargoes*. This work provides much of the history and many of the statistics reported here.

4. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, 169–70. See also Mannix, *Black Cargoes*, 2–3, and Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas*, 15, 27.
5. Phlm 10–17 (NRSV).
6. Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, 104.
7. Cowley, introduction to Mannix, *Black Cargoes*, viii.
8. Cowley, introduction to Mannix, *Black Cargoes*, xi.
9. Mannix, *Black Cargoes*, 43.
10. Mannix, *Black Cargoes*, 12–13.
11. Copeland, "Enfleshing Freedom," 69.
12. For a detailed study of American slave markets, see Johnson, *Soul by Soul*. This section draws on this book as well as on the work of historian David Brion Davis.
13. Fredrickson distinguishes between the view of slaves as "beasts" or as "children," characterizing a tension between plantation as commercial venture using subhuman laborers and plantation as small patriarchal society (*The Black Image in the White Mind*, 56). I emphasize the "beast" designation, as slaves were imported primarily to work the fields and bring economic gain to their owners, not to join plantation families as objects of their affection.
14. On the idea that owning another human being is a lie, see Copeland, "Enfleshing Freedom," 69.
15. Brent, *Incidents*, 662.
16. Brent, *Incidents*, 663.
17. Copeland, "Enfleshing Freedom," 79.
18. Lk 16:13 (NRSV).
19. Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, 104.
20. For an in-depth discussion of sugar production and the terrible hardships it imposed on New World slaves, see Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, Chap. 5.
21. Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 387.
22. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, Chap. 2.
23. Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, Chap. 3.
24. Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 102.
25. Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 121–22.
26. Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 30–31. The offending passage is, "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ; not only while being watched, and in order to please them, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart" (Eph 6:5–6 [NRSV]).
27. Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 209.
28. Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 183–86.
29. Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 98–99.
30. For a full account of how slaves practiced religion, see Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, Chap. 5.
31. Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 100.
32. Fredrickson describes the American colonization movement in *The Black Image in the White Mind*, Chap. 1.
33. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, 15–21.
34. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, 17.

35. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, 28.
36. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, 43, 46–48.
37. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, 49.
38. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, 58.
39. Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 101.
40. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, 49–50.
41. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, 47.
42. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, 69–70.
43. The trade did not actually cease until much later. Scholars are not sure when the final cargo of slaves arrived in the New World, but the large-scale trade seems to have ended in the 1860s, though a few ships carrying slaves may have landed in Cuba and Brazil as late as the 1880s. Mannix, *Black Cargoes*, 287.
44. Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, 298.
45. Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 228–32. On black people who attained public office during Reconstruction, see Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 237–46.
46. Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, 10, 298.
47. Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 225.
48. For example, see Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 233; Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 43, 45–46.
49. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, 22, 3; Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 227; Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 44.
50. Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 246, 262.
51. In *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* Kelly Brown Douglas considers who espouses "true" Christianity; in her analysis, Klan members are not the only Christians who miss the mark. Douglas also chronicles the history of the comparison between Jesus and victims of lynchings in *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 61–70.
52. Ida B. Wells-Barnett's works chronicle many instances of lynching. For example, on rape as a crime for which black people were lynched, see Chap. 6 of Wells-Barnett's *A Red Record*, in Wells-Barnett, *On Lynchings*.
53. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 59–62.
54. See Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 330–39. Franklin and Moss describe racial discrimination within the U.S. armed forces during World War II in *From Slavery to Freedom*, 438–48.
55. On race and the media, in addition to Collins's work—especially *Black Sexual Politics*, Chaps. 4 and 5—see Entman and Rojecki, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, and Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*. For the historical development of these ideas, see Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, as well as D'Emilio and Freedman's *Intimate Matters*, especially Chap. 5, "Race and Sexuality."
56. Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 162–64.
57. Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 130.
58. For one example, see Papon's careful critique in "Dances with Discrimination: On '*Avatar*,' Racism, Misogyny, and Disabled Prejudice." The public comments following this online essay are especially telling, with some weighing in to argue that *Avatar* is simply meant to entertain (despite Cameron's insistence otherwise) and that a "politically correct" movie would necessarily be boring.

10.1057/9780230114715 - Racism and the Image of God, Karen Teel

In terms of race, it is hard to imagine how casting some white actors as Na'vi and some actors of color as human would have made *Avatar*'s story line less exciting (that is, less action-packed), though it might have been less likely to encourage white viewers as a group to critique our imperialist tendencies—or, conversely, to continue to see ourselves as the "saviors" of people of color.

59. Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 123–24.
60. hooks, *All About Love*, 95–98.
61. As chapter 4 shows, these three categories roughly correspond to Cannon's description of enslaved black female bodies treated as object of property, brood-sow, and work-ox. See Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, Chap. 2.
62. Davis and Cannon both point out that this view of human beings corresponds to the idea of the Great Chain of Being, which, as Davis notes, contradicts the Jewish and Christian notion that all human persons are made in God's image. See Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, 74–75, and Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 41.
63. See Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists.*

3 Racism as a Theological Problem

1. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*.
2. Nilson, *Hearing Past the Pain*, 69.
3. Cone, "Theology's Great Sin."
4. Copeland, "Guest Editorial," 607. See also Copeland, "Body, Race, and Being."
5. Gn 1:26, 2:7 (NRSV).
6. Brown, *The Body and Society*, 29–30.
7. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Theological Orations*, 144, 150–51.
8. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*; *The Trinity*, books XII.3 and XI, respectively.
9. Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, 129, 141–43.
10. Teresa of Ávila, *The Life of Saint Teresa of Ávila by Herself*, Chap. 20.
11. Luther, "Freedom of a Christian," 68.
12. Luther, "The Pagan Servitude of the Church," 337–38.
13. See Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, and Butler, *Bodies that Matter.*
14. See Ruether, "Christology: Can a Male Savior Save Women?" in *Sexism and God-Talk*, 116–38; Johnson, "Redeeming the Name of Christ"; Isherwood, *The Good News of the Body*; John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body.*
15. See Tanner, "The Difference Theological Anthropology Makes," 573; McFarland, *Difference & Identity*, 15.
16. Eilberg-Schwartz, "The Problem of the Body for the People of the Book," 50–51.
17. Gottstein, "The Body as Image of God in Rabbinic Literature," 178. Taking this question further, Aaron points out some methodological problems in Gottstein's approach in "Shedding Light on God's Body in Rabbinic Midrashim."
18. Matt, "Fading Image of God?" 83.
19. Griffith, "Human Bodiliness."

20. See McFarland, *Difference & Identity*, especially 20–26, for the distinction of "image of God" language from "person" language; Hopkins, *Being Human*; and Teevan, "Challenges to the Role of Theological Anthropology in Feminist Theologies," respectively.
21. McFarland, *Difference & Identity*, 108–9, 58.
22. McFarland, *Difference & Identity*, 60–61.
23. McFarland, *The Divine Image*, 57.
24. Tanner, "The Difference Theological Anthropology Makes," 573–74.
25. Hilkert, "Cry Beloved Image," 202.
26. Morrison, *Beloved*, 88. For example, Douglas cites this novel in *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 76, and Copeland relies heavily on it in *Enfleshing Freedom.*
27. Chapters 6 and 7 discuss two exceptions: Kelly Brown Douglas and M. Shawn Copeland. See also Sheppard, "A Dark Goodness Created in the Image of God." Exploring particular black women's experiences of embodiment, Sheppard lays the groundwork for a "womanist practical theology of embodiment" (10) and briefly identifies black womanhood as created in God's image (26).
28. Nilson, *Hearing Past the Pain*, and "Confessions of a White Catholic Racist Theologian," in *Interrupting White Privilege*, Cassidy and Mikulich, eds., 15–39.
29. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*. The English translation of the book appeared in 1973.
30. Hennelly, *Liberation Theologies*, 25–26, 94.
31. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, xii.
32. Cone, "Theology's Great Sin," 4–5.
33. Andolsen, *"Daughters of Jefferson, Daughters of Bootblacks": Racism and American Feminism*; Connolly, "Revelation as Liberation from Oppression: Black Theology's Challenge for American Catholic Theology"; Hobgood, *Dismantling Privilege: An Ethics of Accountability*; Doak, "Cornel West's Challenge to the Evasion of Black Theology"; Mikulich, "Mapping 'Whiteness': The Complexity of Racial Formation and the Subversive Moral Imagination of the 'Motley Crowd' "; Perkinson, *White Theology: Outing Supremacy in Modernity*; Harvey, Case, and Gorsline, eds., *Disrupting White Supremacy from Within: White People on What WE Need to Do*; Jon Nilson, *Hearing Past the Pain.*
34. Curran, "White Privilege: My Theological Journey."
35. This raises a difficult issue that I cannot address in detail here: how should the antiracist white theologian deal with the fact that some may attend to her antiracist message only because of her white privilege?
36. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, xii, 9.

4 Combat Breathing: Katie Geneva Cannon

1. Cobb, *An Inquiry into the Law of Negro Slavery in the United States of America*, 39.
2. Cobb, *An Inquiry into the Law of Negro Slavery in the United States of America*, 37.

3. Prince, *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave*, 256–57.
4. Prince, *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave*, 266.
5. Cannon quoted in Lawrence-Lightfoot, “Katie Cannon,” 59.
6. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 31.
7. hooks, *Ain’t I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End, 1981), 20–22, quoted in Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 37.
8. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, Chap. 2. Copeland makes a similar distinction in “Enfleshing Freedom,” 71.
9. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 37; *Katie’s Canon*, 49.
10. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, Chap. 2.
11. Prince, *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave*, 255, 276, 272–73.
12. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 32–34.
13. Prince, *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave*, 263–64, 281.
14. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 38.
15. Prince, *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave*, 269–70.
16. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 42–44.
17. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 51–52. Cannon refers to the Jim Crow segregation laws as “Jim and Jane Crow” when interviewed by Risher in “Giving Forward.”
18. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 47.
19. Cannon, *Katie’s Canon*, 52; Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 61–62, 47.
20. Cannon, *Katie’s Canon*, 53.
21. Cannon, “The Positionality of Women in the African American Church Community,” 214.
22. Cannon, *Katie’s Canon*, 50–55.
23. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 50, 19, 51–52.
24. Cannon, “The Positionality of Women in the African American Church Community,” 212–14.
25. Cannon, *Katie’s Canon*, 119.
26. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 82.
27. Dewan, “In County Made Rich by Golf, Some Enclaves are Left Behind.”
28. Cannon, *Katie’s Canon*, 55–56.
29. Cannon and Heyward, *Alienation and Anger*, 13–14.
30. Cannon, *Katie’s Canon*, 56.
31. Cannon, *Katie’s Canon*, 70.
32. Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*, 290.
33. Washington, *Black-Eyed Susans*, xvi.
34. Cannon, *Katie’s Canon*, 71; Washington, *Black-Eyed Susans*, xvii.
35. Washington, *Black-Eyed Susans*, xvii, citing Toni Morrison.
36. Lawrence-Lightfoot, “Katie Cannon,” 35–36; Cannon, *Katie’s Canon*, 168.
37. See Walker, “*One* Child of One’s Own,” in *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*, 371–93.
38. Walker reports this conversation in *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*, 385.
39. Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 119.
40. Cannon, *Katie’s Canon*, 73–76, drawing on Henderson, “Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*.”
41. See also Henderson, “Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*.”

42. Henderson, "Toni Morrison's *Beloved*."
43. Cannon, *Katie's Canon*, 75.
44. Eiesland, *The Disabled God*; Stuart, "Disruptive Bodies."
45. Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, 62–63.
46. Cannon, "Unearthing Ethical Treasures," 57.
47. Gregory Mantsio, "Class in America: Myths and Realities," in *Race, Class, and Gender in the United States: An Integrative Study*, 4th ed., Paula S. Rothenberg, ed. (New York: St. Martin's, 1998), 202–14, quoted in Cannon, "Unearthing Ethical Treasures," 59–60.
48. Risher, "Giving Forward."
49. Cannon, "Unearthing Ethical Treasures," 62.
50. Cannon, *Katie's Canon*, 114.
51. Risher, "Giving Forward."
52. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, xv–xvi (introduction to the 1986 edition); Hopkins, *Heart and Head*.
53. Cannon, "[Reply to Cheryl J. Sanders]," in Sanders et al., "Roundtable Discussion," 93. See also Douglas, *The Black Christ*, 113–16, and more generally, Gilkes, *If It Wasn't For The Women*, and Riggs, "The Socio-Religious Ethical Tradition of Black Women."
54. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 1.
55. Cannon, "Jots and Tittles," 100.
56. Cannon, "Jots and Tittles," 100.
57. Cannon, *Katie's Canon*, 123–27.
58. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 2; Cannon, *Katie's Canon*, 123.
59. Cannon, *Katie's Canon*, 58.
60. Cannon and Heyward, *Alienation and Anger*, 3.
61. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 3.
62. Cannon, *Katie's Canon*, 128.
63. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 17.
64. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 102.
65. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 104. Walker concurs; see *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, 85.
66. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 101.
67. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 125.
68. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 125–26.
69. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 133.
70. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 144.
71. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 144–51.
72. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 147.
73. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 160–63.
74. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 1.
75. Shange, *Three Pieces*, xii.
76. Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, 65.
77. For a more extensive analysis of Cannon's struggle with black embodiment, see Sheppard, "A Dark Goodness Created in the Image of God," 11–14.
78. Lawrence-Lightfoot, "Katie Cannon," 52–54.
79. Lawrence-Lightfoot, "Katie Cannon," 100, 107, 30.

80. Magubane, "Why 'Nappy' Is Offensive."
81. Lawrence-Lightfoot, "Katie Cannon," 97.

5 Surrogacy and Survival: Delores S. Williams

1. For example, see Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare*, and Neubeck and Cazenave, *Welfare Racism*.
2. Dyck and Hussey, "The End of Welfare As We Know It?" 589.
3. Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 119.
4. Gn 16, 21:1–21 (NRSV).
5. Williams, "Black Women's Surrogacy Experience and the Christian Notion of Redemption," 1.
6. Williams, "Black Women's Surrogacy Experience and the Christian Notion of Redemption," 5.
7. Williams, "Black Women's Surrogacy Experience and the Christian Notion of Redemption," 5.
8. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, Chap. 3.
9. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 82.
10. This account of race in media coverage of surrogacy relationships is drawn from Markens, *Surrogate Motherhood and the Politics of Reproduction*, Chap. 4.
11. Harris, "Stand-In Mother." Markens directed me to this quotation (*Surrogate Motherhood and the Politics of Reproduction*, 89).
12. Ryan, *Ethics and Economics of Assisted Reproduction*, 58.
13. Bridges, "On the Commodification of the Black Female Body."
14. Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 39–41.
15. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, Chap. 4, especially 89–91.
16. Neubeck and Cazenave, *Welfare Racism*, 145–76.
17. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, Chap. 4, quotation 104.
18. Williams, "A Time of Decision for the Black Community."
19. This further blurs the line Eiesland tries to draw in *The Disabled God*, described in chapter 3, which questioned Eiesland's remark that skin color would never be considered a disability. Williams also would not accept this assertion at face value.
20. Roberts, *Killing the Black Body*, 283.
21. Venezia, "Black Baby Is Born to White Pair."
22. Williams, "Colorstruck." *Andrews v. Keltz* settled before going to trial.
23. Williams, "African-American Women in Three Contexts of Domestic Abuse."
24. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 136–39.
25. Williams, "Straight Talk, Plain Talk," 117–21.
26. Williams, "Women's Oppression and Lifeline Politics in Black Women's Religious Narratives," 62–66.
27. Williams, "Women's Oppression and Lifeline Politics in Black Women's Religious Narratives," 69.
28. Williams, "Black Women's Surrogacy Experience and the Christian Notion of Redemption," 8.

29. Williams, "Black Women's Surrogacy Experience and the Christian Notion of Redemption," and *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 161–67.
30. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 165.
31. Williams, "Black Women's Surrogacy Experience and the Christian Notion of Redemption," 8–13.
32. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 164–65.
33. Williams, "Christian Scapegoating" and "A Crucifixion Double Cross?"
34. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 3.
35. Cone, "Strange Fruit."
36. Terrell, *Power in the Blood?* 113–25.
37. Choi, "Transforming Power in the Lives of Women as Surrogates."
38. Choi, "Transforming Power in the Lives of Women as Surrogates," 153.
39. Sobrino, "The Resurrection of One Crucified."
40. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 81.
41. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 173–76.
42. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 192, 176.
43. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 173–99.
44. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 177.
45. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 41, 176.
46. See, for example, Gilkes, *If It Wasn't For The Women*, Chap. 6.
47. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 58.
48. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 176.
49. Gilkes, *If It Wasn't For The Women*, Chap. 4.
50. Gilkes, *If It Wasn't For The Women*, Chap. 6.
51. Gilkes, *If It Wasn't For The Women*, 63–65.
52. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 196–98.
53. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 193.
54. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, Chap. 1.
55. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 41.
56. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 42, 46.
57. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, Chap. 2, especially 56–59.
58. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, Chap. 2, especially 35–36.
59. Gilkes, *If It Wasn't For The Women*, 11–12.
60. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 52–56.
61. Harrison, " 'Hagar Ain't Workin', Gimme Me Celie!' "
62. Harrison, " 'Hagar Ain't Workin', Gimme Me Celie!' " 49.
63. Harrison, " 'Hagar Ain't Workin', Gimme Me Celie!' " 51, 54, emphasis added.
64. Walker, *The Color Purple*, 204.
65. Holmes, "Delores Williams' Theology of the Wilderness Experience."
66. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 118.
67. Holmes, "Delores Williams' Theology of the Wilderness Experience," 20–22.
68. Holmes, "Delores Williams' Theology of the Wilderness Experience," 25.
69. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 168.
70. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 176.
71. Holmes, "Delores Williams' Theology of the Wilderness Experience," 15.
72. Sweeney, "Williams' Theological Anthropology."

73. If Sweeney is correct, Williams may here be constructing a Spirit Christology that stands with that described by, for example, Haight in *Jesus Symbol of God*, 445–65.
74. This idea is explored further in the next chapter.
75. McFarland, *The Divine Image*.
76. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 164.
77. For an incisive look at the 1950s ideal of the "American family," see Coontz, *The Way We Never Were* and *The Way We Really Are*. I use "whiteness" here in the sense of Cone, who refers to "blackness" as shorthand for the liberation and wholeness that God desires for African Americans and to "whiteness" as the death-dealing tendency of European American culture to dominate peoples of color. See, for example, *A Black Theology of Liberation*.
78. Though I do not explore the connection here, I suspect that Native peoples of the Americas might well have some affinity with this womanist sense of wilderness and that European Americans could learn a great deal from them.
79. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 74. Again, by "whiteness" Cone means the imperialist tendencies that have characterized European American relations with peoples of color since Columbus's 1492 "discovery."

6 The Color of Christianity: Kelly Brown Douglas

1. For example, in 2008, while California voters narrowly passed Proposition 8, restricting marriage to opposite-sex couples, seven of ten black voters backed the measure. Vick and Surdin, "Most of California's Black Voters Backed Gay Marriage Ban." See also the Pew Research Center report "Independents Take Center Stage in Obama Era," section 4, "Religion and Social Values."
2. See Sanders et al., "Roundtable Discussion"; Coleman et al., "Roundtable Discussion."
3. For a historical account of this evolution from antiquity to the present, see Painter, *The History of White People*.
4. Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, Chap. 1.
5. Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 85.
6. Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 67.
7. West, "A Space for Faith, Sexual Desire, and Ethical Black Ministerial Practices," 32.
8. Anderson, "The Black Church and the Curious Body of the Black Homosexual," 297.
9. Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 4–5.
10. For example, see Townes, *Breaking the Fine Rain of Death*.
11. Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 106.
12. Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 150–63. See also the exchange between Coleman and Cannon in Coleman et al., "Roundtable Discussion."

13. Pinn, *The Black Church in the Post–Civil Rights Era*, 108.
14. West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics*, 147. Riggs provides one possible model for such discussions in *Plenty Good Room*.
15. Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 149.
16. See Smith, "The Bible, the Body and a Black Sexual Discourse of Resistance."
17. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?*
18. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 39–50.
19. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 16–17.
20. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 25–29.
21. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 50–52.
22. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 68. Douglas's extended comparison between lynching and Christ's crucifixion is found in *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 61–74.
23. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 56.
24. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 24; Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 25–26. Douglas explores this idea thoroughly in *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* The exclusivity of Greek origins for this dualism is contested; see Eilberg-Schwartz's argument that ancient Jewish attitudes toward bodies were also conflicted in "The Problem of the Body for the People of the Book," 45.
25. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 21–22.
26. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 70.
27. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 31.
28. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 37, 133.
29. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 139.
30. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 142.
31. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 166–67, 178–85, 181–83.
32. Earl, "Loving Our Black Bodies as God's Luminously Dark Temples."
33. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 185–98.
34. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 207.
35. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 177, 179–80.
36. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 215, 202–12.
37. Douglas, "Black Church Homophobia: What to Do About It?" especially 17.
38. On the distinction between core and contingent beliefs, see Douglas and Hopson, "Understanding the Black Church," especially 100–102; see also Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 201–5.
39. For Douglas's view of the black Christ as liberator, see Douglas, *The Black Christ*, especially 107–10.
40. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 76.
41. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 77, 215.
42. Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 112–21.
43. Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 113.
44. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 18.
45. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 82–89.
46. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 82.

47. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 89–103.
48. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 96, 183.
49. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 105.
50. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 214.
51. Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 112.
52. Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 115, 120–21.
53. Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 139.
54. Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 106.
55. Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 126–30.
56. Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 107.
57. See Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 96; Smith, "The Bible, the Body and a Black Sexual Discourse of Resistance."
58. Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 118.
59. Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 114.
60. Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 115.
61. Douglas, "Black Church Homophobia: What to Do About It?" 15–16.
62. Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 85.
63. See Benedict XVI, "Faith, Reason and the University."
64. Phan, "Speaking in Many Tongues," 19.
65. Phan, "Speaking in Many Tongues," 18.
66. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 159–62.
67. Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 8; Paris, *The Spirituality of African Peoples*, 29.
68. Quoted in Paris, *The Spirituality of African Peoples*, 29.
69. Acts 17:22–31 (NRSV).
70. Paris, *The Spirituality of African Peoples*, 38.
71. Paris, *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches*, 10.
72. Raising a question that merits further study, Paris suggests that the interaction of African and Christian beliefs calls into question the Christian claim to revelatory uniqueness (*The Spirituality of African Peoples*, 29). A Catholic may here be reminded of the Vatican II (1962–65) declaration that all great religions of the world contain "ray[s] of truth." See Vatican II, *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate)*, par. 2. Douglas's proposal suggests that such truths can be mutually correcting.
73. Raboteau concludes, "In the United States the gods of Africa died." *Slave Religion*, 86.
74. Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery*, 58–59.
75. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 201.
76. Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery*, 15.
77. Paris, *The Spirituality of African Peoples*, 42–43.
78. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 160–61.
79. Paris, *The Spirituality of African Peoples*, 11.
80. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 202. See also Cone, "Calling the Oppressors to Account."
81. Douglas, "Black Church Homophobia: What to Do About It?" 15.
82. Douglas, "Black Church Homophobia: What to Do About It?" 17, emphasis added.
83. Perkinson, *White Theology*, especially Chap. 8.

84. Paris, *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches*, 16.
85. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 35.
86. Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?* 110.
87. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1.
88. See especially the following essays in Pinn and Hopkins, *Loving the Body*: West, "A Space for Faith, Sexual Desire, and Ethical Black Ministerial Practices"; Griffin, "Toward a True Black Liberation Theology"; Anderson, "The Black Church and the Curious Body of the Black Homosexual."
89. Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 126.
90. Rodríguez cautions, "There is something imperialistic and paternalistic about any view of humanity that treats the victims of oppression as less than human by denying them the capacity to act as sinfully as their oppressors." *Racism and God-Talk*, 27.
91. Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 114.

7 Shoulder to Shoulder: M. Shawn Copeland

1. Thrasher, *Circle of Trust*, 221.
2. Thrasher, *Circle of Trust*, 221.
3. Browning, *Shiloh Witness*, 55.
4. Curry, *Wild Geese to the Past*, 8.
5. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 8.
6. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 2, 5–6.
7. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 4, 2.
8. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 6.
9. Copeland, "Guest Editorial," 605.
10. Nilson, *Hearing Past the Pain*, 90.
11. This in contrast to Alice Walker's "womanist" who, precociously, wants "to know more and in greater depth than is considered 'good' for one." Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, xi.
12. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 52.
13. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 4.
14. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 76.
15. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 82.
16. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 84.
17. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 124.
18. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 103.
19. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 108, 110. The phrase "first-century lynching" is James Cone's.
20. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 116, 124.
21. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 59.
22. See Jn 8:11 (NRSV).
23. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 24.
24. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 8.
25. See Gn 2:7 (NRSV).
26. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 24.

27. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 27.
28. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 25.
29. Washington, introduction to *Black-Eyed Susans*, xvii.
30. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 18.
31. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 4.
32. Morrison, *Beloved*, 88–89.
33. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 52.
34. Adapted from Morrison, *Beloved*, 88.
35. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 102.
36. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 103–4.
37. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 103.
38. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 102–3.
39. Pramuk, "'Living in the Master's House,'" 315.
40. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 73.
41. Copeland, "Guest Editorial," 607.
42. Rahner, "The Body in the Order of Salvation," 87–88.
43. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 102.
44. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 99, 105.
45. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 51.
46. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 110.
47. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 105.
48. Copeland, "'Wading Through Many Sorrows.'"
49. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 3.
50. Copeland proposes this threefold outline in "'Wading Through Many Sorrows,'" 123–24.
51. Copeland, "'Wading Through Many Sorrows,'" 122.
52. Townes, *A Troubling In My Soul*, vii.
53. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 101.
54. Copeland, "'Wading Through Many Sorrows,'" 124, 113–18.
55. Copeland, "'Wading Through Many Sorrows,'" 118.
56. Copeland, "'Wading Through Many Sorrows,'" 123.
57. Mt 26:39 (NRSV).
58. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 99–101.
59. For example, see Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, especially 161–67.
60. Mt 26:45 (NRSV).
61. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 55.
62. See Mk 15:34 (NRSV).
63. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 101.
64. See Sobrino, "The Resurrection of One Crucified."
65. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 126.
66. Since the beginning of her theological career, Copeland has been calling all theologians, including white theologians, to this task. See especially her essay "Racism and the Vocation of the Christian Theologian."
67. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 125.
68. In particular, see Copeland's essay "Toward a Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity." "Racism and the Vocation of the Christian Theologian" is also relevant here.

69. For example, Hobgood calls for building alliances and intergroup solidarity in *Dismantling Privilege*; Harvey, Case, and Gorsline present a variety of approaches in their edited volume, *Disrupting White Supremacy from Within*; Perkinson argues for white apostasy from whiteness, exorcism, and rebaptism, and a postwhite practice of solidarity in *White Theology*.
70. Day, *Constructing Solidarity*.
71. Day, *Constructing Solidarity*, 230.
72. Day, *Constructing Solidarity*, 40–41, 385.
73. Day, *Constructing Solidarity*, 14.
74. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 126.
75. Copeland elaborates on the need for dialogue partners to honor their differences in "Toward a Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity," 24–27.
76. Day, *Constructing Solidarity*, 333.
77. Day, *Constructing Solidarity*, 127.
78. Day, *Constructing Solidarity*, 362.
79. Day, *Constructing Solidarity*, 127.
80. Day, *Constructing Solidarity*, 373–81.
81. Copeland, "Toward a Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity," 26.
82. Day, *Constructing Solidarity*, 197.
83. Day, *Constructing Solidarity*, 199.
84. Day, *Constructing Solidarity*, 194, 246, 196.
85. Day, *Constructing Solidarity*, 193.
86. Day, *Constructing Solidarity*, Chap. 3.
87. Day, *Constructing Solidarity*, 269.
88. Day, *Constructing Solidarity*, 241.
89. Day, *Constructing Solidarity*, 368–69, 358.
90. Day, *Constructing Solidarity*, 361.
91. Day, *Constructing Solidarity*, 371–73.
92. Day, *Constructing Solidarity*, 21–22.
93. Day, *Constructing Solidarity*, 50–51.
94. Day, *Constructing Solidarity*, 13.
95. Wise, *White Like Me*, 160–65.
96. Day, *Constructing Solidarity*, 367, 340.
97. Day, *Constructing Solidarity*, 397.
98. Day, *Constructing Solidarity*, 401.
99. Day, *Constructing Solidarity*, 246.
100. Day, *Constructing Solidarity*, 251.
101. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 127.
102. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 2, 4.
103. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 59.
104. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 126.
105. Following Copeland, I allude here to Morrison's conclusion to *Beloved*, "This is not a story to pass on." See Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 3; Morrison, *Beloved*, 274–75.
106. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 128.
107. See Mt 25:31–46 (NRSV).

8 Dismantling Evil: Emilie M. Townes

1. To be more precise, since his father was Kenyan and his mother European American, President Barack Obama is biracial. Thus, when he announced his candidacy, most European Americans saw him as black, while some African Americans wondered whether he was “black enough.”
2. McWhorter, “The End of Racism?”
3. Robertson, “Ruling on Katrina Flooding Favors Homeowners.”
4. This shift is symbolized by Townes’s edited companion volumes *A Troubling in My Soul* and *Embracing the Spirit*.
5. Townes, *In a Blaze of Glory*, 138.
6. Townes frames this lament in the context of the prophet Joel in *Breaking the Fine Rain of Death*.
7. Townes, “[Response],” 117.
8. Ginzburg collects these articles in *100 Years of Lynchings*.
9. Townes discusses lynching in *In a Blaze of Glory*, Chap. 3. Her discussion of landfills begins on page 55.
10. Sabol, West, and Cooper, “Prisoners in 2008”; Human Rights Watch, “Incarcerated America.”
11. For discussions of this experiment, see Townes, “ ‘The Doctor Ain’t Taking No Sticks,’ ” and *Breaking the Fine Rain of Death*, Chap. 4. For a comprehensive study, see Jones, *Bad Blood*.
12. Townes, *Breaking the Fine Rain of Death*, 102.
13. Beardsley, *A History of Neglect*, 12.
14. Townes, *Breaking the Fine Rain of Death*, 104.
15. See especially Townes, *Breaking the Fine Rain of Death*, 121–25.
16. See Townes, “Vanishing into Limbo”; *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, Chap. 3.
17. Townes, *In a Blaze of Glory*, 80–81.
18. Townes, *In a Blaze of Glory*, 80.
19. Townes, *Breaking the Fine Rain of Death*, 131, 139–40; Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 67; Riggs, *Plenty Good Room*, 9.
20. Department of Health and Human Services, “Infant Mortality and African Americans.”
21. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 19.
22. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 20.
23. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 97.
24. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 61.
25. Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters*, 6. Frankenberg’s work anticipates some of the themes in sociologist Bonilla-Silva’s *Racism without Racists*. One comprehensive text on the subject is Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical White Studies*.
26. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 60.
27. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 63.
28. “Geneticists calculate that there is an average genetic variation of 5 percent between racial groups. This leaves 95 percent of variation that occurs within racial groups—a stunning figure given how much of what we call race is

really about color." Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 63.

29. See Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists*, 8–9.
30. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 67. For an account of the emergence of what we now call "racism" in the context of the "invention of Africa," see Appiah, *In My Father's House*; for arguments about how race should function in U.S. public policy, see Appiah and Gutmann, *Color Conscious*.
31. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 67.
32. Perkinson, *White Theology*, 2. Nine white Catholic theologians address theological racism in Cassidy and Mikulich, *Interrupting White Privilege*.
33. Morrison, *The Dancing Mind*.
34. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 25.
35. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 17.
36. West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics*.
37. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 61.
38. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 22–23.
39. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 27.
40. Townes, *Breaking the Fine Rain of Death*, 123.
41. Townes, *In a Blaze of Glory*, 85.
42. See Townes, "To Be Called Beloved"; *In a Blaze of Glory*, 47–48.
43. Townes, "A Womanist Perspective on Spirituality in Leadership," 98.
44. Townes, *In a Blaze of Glory*, 139–44; *Breaking the Fine Rain of Death*, 151.
45. See Townes, *Breaking the Fine Rain of Death*, Chap. 1.
46. Townes, *In a Blaze of Glory*, 83.
47. Townes's first book, *Womanist Justice, Womanist Hope*, discusses the life of Ida B. Wells-Barnett.
48. Townes, *Breaking the Fine Rain of Death*, 50.
49. See Townes, "Keeping a Clean House Will Not Keep a Man at Home," 143.
50. See especially Townes, *Breaking the Fine Rain of Death*, Chap. 2.
51. See Townes, *Breaking the Fine Rain of Death*, 50, 71, 124.
52. Townes, "Women's Wisdom on Solidarity and Differences (On Not Rescuing the Killers)."
53. Townes, *Breaking the Fine Rain of Death*, 42, 64.
54. On colorism in the black community, see Townes, *In a Blaze of Glory*, Chap. 5.
55. Townes, *In a Blaze of Glory*, 110.
56. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 73; Perkinson, *White Theology*.
57. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 77.
58. Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists*, 15.
59. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, 78.
60. See Samuelson, "Biblical Anti-Obama Slogan: Use of Psalm 109:8 Funny or Sinister?"
61. Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, xi.
62. McWhorter, "The End of Racism?"

63. I am grateful to M. Shawn Copeland for articulating this notion of commitment to the truth of the matter.
64. Other theologians have suggested this; for example, McFarland makes a similar move in *Difference & Identity*. I am suggesting Townes's notion of countermemory as a concrete technique or strategy for doing this.
65. Townes, *Breaking the Fine Rain of Death*, 172–75.
66. Townes, *In a Blaze of Glory*, 67.
67. See Townes, "Searching for Paradise in a World of Theme Parks"; *Breaking the Fine Rain of Death*, 172; "Girlfriend, You Can't Do That, and Here's Why."

9 One Body at a Time

1. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 160–63.
2. Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 112.
3. Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 141.
4. McFarland, *Difference & Identity*, vii.
5. Aquinas, *St. Thomas Aquinas: Philosophical Texts*, 157. The excerpt is from Thomas's *Compendium theologiae ad fratrem Reginaldum socium suum carissimum*, Chap. 102.
6. Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 114.
7. Jacquelyn Grant also addresses this issue in "The Sin of Servanthood and the Deliverance of Discipleship."
8. Day, *Constructing Solidarity*, 368.
9. Wise, *White Like Me*, 103.
10. For accounts of this privilege, see Wise, *White Like Me*; Curran, "White Privilege: My Theological Journey"; Tatum, *"Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?"*; McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack."
11. Wise names this "white bonding" and suggests we interrupt it in kind. Wise, *White Like Me*, 91–93.
12. I borrow this phrase from Appiah and Gutmann, who argue in *Color Conscious* that awareness of racial inequalities, not a pretense to colorblindness, should actively shape U.S. social policy.
13. On finding white antiracist role models, see Tatum, *"Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?"*; Wise, *White Like Me*, 83–84.
14. Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, xi.
15. Wise, *White Like Me*, 63.
16. Perkinson, *White Theology*, 47.
17. See Cannon, "Not Easy," 39; Hayes, "Standing in the Shoes My Mother Made," 74; Baker-Fletcher, "A Womanist Journey," 166.
18. Gn 1:26–31 (NRSV).
19. See Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, 92.

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Index

Aaron, David H., 176n17
abolitionists, 26
abortion, 82, 83
adoption, 81–2
American Colonization Society, 26
Anderson, Victor, 101
Andolsen, Barbara Hilkert, 49
Andrews, Nancy and Thomas, 83–4
Andrews v. Keltz, 83–4, 180n22
antiracism, *see* racism, strategies for resisting
Appiah, Kwame Anthony, 190n12
Aquinas, Thomas, 9, 115, 164
Asian American theologies, 8
Atlantic slave trade, 16–20, 175n43
  see also Middle Passage
Augustine of Hippo, 39–40, 114–15
Avatar (James Cameron), 33, 175n58

Baartman, Saartjie (Sarah), 146
Baker-Fletcher, Karen, 10
Baldwin, James, 89
baptism
  call to solidarity with suffering bodies, 172
  colonial legislation regarding, 25
  denied to slaves, 25, 104
  forced on slaves, 24
  see also Christianity
Beardsley, Edward H., 146
beauty, 61, 74–6, 127–8
"beloved community," 141
Beloved (Toni Morrison), 47, 63–4, 92–3, 124, 127–8, 131, 135, 187n105
Benedict XVI (Pope), 110
Bible
  accepting/condoning slavery and genocide, 3
  ambivalent toward bodies, 3, 39
  ambivalent toward strangers, 3–4
  covenant and racial purity, 3
  Genesis creation stories, 39, 41, 108, 126, 162, 163
  Greek influence on, 110
  and homosexuality, 100, 102, 109
  image of God in, 39, 41
  interpretation of, 25
  used to support/justify slavery, 4, 24, 25
  See also Paul
black Christ, *see under* Jesus Christ
black Christian churches
  and heterosexism and homophobia, *see under* heterosexism and homophobia
  lack of healthy sexual ethic, 101–2
  origins in slavery, 24–5
  during Reconstruction, 28
  during segregation, 59
  women's situation, 59, 65–6, 90
  worship services, 99, 117
  see also black faith tradition; platonization
black codes, 29
black faith tradition, 106–10, 112, 113–14
  see also black Christian churches; platonization
black fathers, 88
Black Feminist Thought (Patricia Hill Collins), 87, 88

black mothers, 77–98 *passim*
  bodies, as sites of incarnation, 93–5
  central to liberating theology, 87
  imaging God, 92–5
  misunderstood by black men, 90
  resistance and survival activity, 87–92
  stereotypes of, 77–8; *see also* black women, stereotypes of
  surrogacy experiences, 79–87; *see also* surrogacy
  and white mothers, 77–8
"blackness"
  of Barack Obama, 188n1
  development of concept, 17
  liberation, 182n77
  vilified in U.S. society, 83
black people
  attitudes toward homosexuality, *see* heterosexism and homophobia; homosexuality
  aware of bodies as critical factor in society, 7
  dismantling the cultural production of evil, 152–3
  first brought to "New World," 17–18
  genocidal impulse against, in U.S. society, 83, 145
  health, thwarted by white culture, 145–7, 151, 152
  imaging God, *see* bodies, human, differences, manifesting the image of God; image of God, in black bodies; image of God, in black mothers; image of God, in black women
  incarceration rates, 145
  infiltrated by fantastic hegemonic imagination, 151, 152
  not compensated upon Emancipation, 28–9
  oppression as a common experience, 2
  sexuality*,* *see* sexuality
  skeptical about Christianity, 24–5
  "soul food" tradition, 153
  stereotypes, *see* black people, stereotypes of; black women, stereotypes of
  suffering disproportionately, 145–7
  wary of state authority, 145–7
  see also black mothers; black people, stereotypes of; black women; black women, stereotypes of; bodies, black; bodies, black women's
black people, stereotypes of
  creative reappropriations, 33
  difficult to dispel, 32
  and the election of President Barack Obama, 144
  in the media, 32–4, 175n58
  need for black people to resist, 151, 152
  origins: in European misperceptions of Africans, 19, 30, 104; in slavery, 16, 17, 28, 32, 35, 104, 127
  produced by and exposing the fantastic hegemonic imagination, 148, 158
  subverted by countermemory, 156–7
  see also black women, stereotypes of
Black Power, 31
Black Sexual Politics (Patricia Hill Collins), 32–3
black theology/theologians
  confronting racism in white theology, 47–51, 124, 186n66
  confronting white supremacy, 37–8
  liberationist rather than survivalist, 91
  and womanist theologies, 7
  see also ethics, womanist; theologians of color; womanist theology/theologians; *see also under individual theologians*
Black Theology of Liberation, A (James H. Cone), 48, 66
black women
  in black churches, 59, 65–6, 88–9
  community leaders, 88–9
  and concept of beauty, 61, 74–6, 127–8
  epistemological privilege of the oppressed, *see* combat breathing; epistemological privilege of the oppressed
  exploited, 6, 8, 23–4, 56–7, 79, 176n61
  flourishing, helped and hindered by Christianity, 161–2

imaging God, *see* image of God, in black mothers; image of God, in black women
listening to, as exercise of "option for the poor," 11
moral situation: in contemporary United States, 60–6; under segregation, 58–9; under slavery, 55–8; struggle to survive, 60–6, 68–72
not seen as women (by white people), 61–2
pastors, scarcity, 65–6
prophets, 60
redeeming Christianity from white supremacy, 132, 133, 135
seen as "subhuman" (by Europeans), 55–8
stereotypes of, *see* black women, stereotypes of
struggling for freedom, 12, 121–42 *passim*
suffering: constructive responses to, 132–3; and Jesus's suffering, 85–6, 121–42 *passim;* negative, 131–2; *see also* suffering; surrogacy
surrogates, *see* surrogacy
survival and resistance skills, 84, 165, 170; *see also* epistemological privilege of the oppressed
survival/quality-of-life struggle, 84, 89–92, 94–5, 96
in the theological academy, 66–7; *see also* womanist theology/theologians
see also black mothers; bodies, black; bodies, black women's; womanist

black women, stereotypes of
in black preaching, 65
creative reappropriation, 33
defacing image of God, 127
dehumanizing, 146–7
"Jezebel"/oversexed, 104, 146–7
"mammy," 79, 84, 90, 147, 150
mothers, 77–8
origins in slavery, 127
reimagination of, with countermemory, 150–1
"Sapphire," 147, 150–1, 156–7
see also black people, stereotypes of

bodies, black
ailing, 145–7, 151–3, 158–9, 167; *see also* suffering
cultural icons, 146–7
health, thwarted by white culture, 145–7, 151, 152
humanity restored, 124
image of God, 118, 124, 158–9
and Jesus's body, *see* Jesus Christ, body of
seen as "animals" (by Europeans), 22–7, 34–5, 127
seen as "cargoes" (by Europeans), 19
seen as "hypersexualized" (by Europeans), 27–32, 32–3, 34–5, 104, 146–7
seen as inferior (by Europeans), 19, 24, 26–7
seen as "objects" (by Europeans), 16–22, 34–5
seen as "subhuman" (by Europeans), 22, 25–7, 53–4, 55–8, 174n13
suffering, 131–5; *see also* suffering
well-being, central to authentic "blackness," 106
and wilderness, 92–5
see also black people; bodies, black women's; bodies, human

bodies, black women's
and beauty, 61, 74–6, 127–8
central womanist concern, 7
commodification of (in contemporary U.S. society), 82–3
imaging God, *see* image of God, in black mothers; image of God, in black women
marginalized in society and religion, 8
marked, 60–4
question of blackness as "disability," 63–4
sites of incarnation, 93–5
suffering of, and Jesus's suffering, 85–6, 121–42 *passim*
texts, 62–4
see also bodies, human; bodies, black

bodies, human
  beauty of, and image of God, 127–8
  biblical attitudes toward, 39
  central to solidarity, 121–42 *passim*
  Christian ambivalence toward, 2–4, 38–44, 45
  and Christian worship practices, 99, 117
  critical factor in social relationships, 7, 163
  in current thinking, 41
  differences: manifesting the image of God, 6, 76, 140–2, 158, 162–4, 168; seen as signaling inferiority, 19, 20, 43, 105; used to rank human worth, 3, 8, 43, 105, 161–2
  goodness of, affirmed by Jesus, 107–8
  image of God, *see* image of God, in black bodies; image of God, in black mothers; image of God, in black women; image of God, and bodies
  and justice, 158
  like and unlike other creatures' bodies, 42
  marked, 60–4, 125, 130–1; *see also* Jesus Christ, body of, marked
  mediating divine presence, 130
  in the Middle Ages, 40
  and mystical body of Christ, 128–31
  need for shift toward positive view, 13
  in the patristic era, 39–40
  place to meet God, 96–7
  in redemption, 94
  in the Reformation period, 40
  resurrection, 42–3
  and sacraments, 158
  similarities and differences, 43
  sites of incarnation, 93–5
  and spirit, 130
  uniqueness, 164
  see also bodies, black; bodies, black women's; bodies, white
bodies, white, 136, 140, 166
  see also bodies, human; white people/white Christians
body of Christ, *see* Jesus Christ, body of; mystical body of Christ
Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo, 5, 154, 176n63, 188n25, 189n29
Booty Call (Jeff Pollack), 33
Brent, Linda [Harriet Jacobs], 21, 35, 133
Bridges, Khiara M., 180n13
Browning, Joan, 122
Brown, Peter, 39
Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 28, 30
Bush, George W., 148
Butler, Judith, 41

Calvert, Crispina and Mark, 80–1
Cameron, James, 33
Cannon, Katie Geneva, 11, 23–4, 53–76, 79, 84, 85, 100, 132, 161–71 *passim*, 173n15, 175nn48–9, 175n53, 176nn61–2
Case, Karin A., 49, 187n69
Cassidy, Laurie, 49, 189n32
Cazenave, Noel, 83, 180n1
Chicago, Judy, 62
Choi, Hee An, 86
Christianity
  complicit in limiting (racist) view of bodies, 8
  conversion of enslaved people, 24–5
  core vs. contingent beliefs, 106–7
  failure to confront heresy of slavery, 22
  helping and hindering black women's flourishing, 161–2
  incompatible with racism, 51
  redeemed by black women, 132, 133, 135
  revelatory uniqueness, 184n72
  used to support slavery, 24–5
  see also baptism; Bible; black Christian churches; white Christian churches; white people/white Christians
Christian theological anthropology, *see* theological anthropology
Christology, *see* Jesus Christ
civil rights movement, 28, 31–2, 121–3, 141, 157
class, 64–5, 145–7
closed monotheism, 103, 107, 112
Cobb, Thomas R.R., 53–5, 74
Coleman, Monica A., 100, 102

Colfax, Richard H., 26
Collins, Patricia Hill, 32–3, 87, 88, 176n59
colonizationists, 26
colorism, 60–1, 74–6, 153, 167
Color Purple, The (Alice Walker), 91–2
combat breathing, 55, 73–6, 165
  see also epistemological privilege of the oppressed
complementarity, 41
Cone, James H., 38, 48–9, 50, 66, 85, 89, 97, 113, 124, 182n77, 182n79, 185n19
Confessions (Augustine of Hippo), 39
Connolly, John R., 49
conversion, 136–40
Coontz, Stephanie, 182n77
Copeland, M. Shawn, 6, 7, 12, 21, 38, 121–42, 161–71 *passim*, 174n11, 174n14, 177nn26–7, 190n63
countermemory, 144, 154–7, 158, 165, 169–71
Cowley, Malcolm, 173nn7–8
crucifying cross, *see under* Jesus Christ
cultural production of evil, 12, 147–59
  see also fantastic hegemonic imagination
Curran, Charles E., 49
Curry, Constance, 122
curse of Ham, 106

Davis, David Brion, 29, 173nn4–5, 173n2 (chap. 2), 174n4, 174n6, 174n12, 174nn19–20, 175n44, 176n62
Day, Tammerie, 136–40, 167
Dewan, Shaila, 60
Dinner Party, The (Judy Chicago), 62
disability, 63–4, 81
Disabled God, The (Nancy Eiesland), 63–4
discrimination, *see* heterosexism and homophobia; racism; sexism; white privilege; white supremacy
Doak, Mary C., 49
domestic slave markets, 20–2, 53–4
Douglas, Kelly Brown, 12, 99–119, 147, 161–71 *passim*, 175n51, 177nn26–7
Douglass, Frederick, 23, 35, 116
dualism, 12, 42, 100, 103–5, 107–8, 110, 116, 118, 158, 168, 183n24
  see also platonization
Dubois, Paige, 173n3
Du Bois, W.E.B., 150
Dyck, Joshua J., 180n2

Earl, Riggins R., Jr., 105
Eiesland, Nancy, 63–4, 180n19
Eilberg-Schwartz, Howard, 176n16, 183n24
Emancipation, 27–8, 58
Enfleshing Freedom (M. Shawn Copeland), 7, 121–42 *passim*
epistemological privilege of the oppressed, 53–5, 70, 72, 73–6, 84, 165, 167
  see also combat breathing
equality, as unrealized ideal, 2, 3–4, 8, 13, 27, 32, 43–4, 59–60, 73
ethics, conventional
  and image of God, 45–7
  and white privilege/racism, 149
  womanist critique and reconstruction, 11, 66–73, 168–9
  see also ethics, womanist
ethics, womanist
  commitment to truth, 157–8
  and image of God, 158–9
  lament as strategy, 152
  particularity as starting point, 150
  reconstruction of conventional ethics, 66–73, 168–9
  roots in slavery, 57–8
  strategies for confronting racist ignorance, 144–5, 168–9
  see also ethics, conventional; *see also under individual ethicists*
Eucharist, 123, 125, 129, 135, 141–2
eugenics, 83–4
evil, cultural production of, 12, 147–59
  see also fantastic hegemonic imagination

Fanon, Frantz, 73–4
fantastic hegemonic imagination, 148–51, 155, 159, 165, 167–9, 170
  see also cultural production of evil
feminist movement, 58–9, 62

feminist theology, *see* white feminist theology/theologians
Fleming, Victor, 79
Floyd-Thomas, Stacey M., 10
Foucault, Michel, 41, 148
Frankenberg, Ruth, 149
Franklin, John Hope, 175n45, 175nn47–50, 175n54
Fredrickson, George, 25, 174n13, 174–5nn32–8, 175nn40–42, 175n49
Freedmen's Bureau, 28, 30
freedom
  black women enfleshing, 135, 141
  black (women's) struggle for, 12, 21, 55, 57–8, 72, 79, 117, 124, 135, 165
  destroyed by white supremacy and racism, 122, 140
  Christianity as encouraging, 25, 117
  failing to guarantee respect for bodies, 8, 27
  and homophobia, 109
  Jesus and, 124
  of mind and body, 21–2, 141
  resacralization of black women's bodies, 124
  segregation and racism as violation, 121–2
  and solidarity, 12, 122
  transition to, of formerly enslaved people, 29–30
  see also equality, as unrealized ideal
frugality (as a virtue), 68

genocide
  of black people (actual and perceived), 83, 145
  commanded in the Bible, 3
  of Native peoples, 17
  see also lynching; slavery
Gilkes, Cheryl Townsend, 88–9, 90–1, 179n53
Ginzburg, Ralph, 188n8
God, Christian
  and African High God, 111, 184n72
  black, 50
  body of, 42
  insulted by/opposed to racism, 37, 96, 97
  opposed to suffering, 85–6, 108, 133–5
  promoting survival and liberation, 89–91
  in the wilderness, 93–4
  see also closed monotheism; image of God; incarnation; Jesus Christ; Trinity
Godwin, Morgan, 26
Gone with the Wind (Victor Fleming), 79–80
Gorsline, Robin Hawley, 49, 187n69
Gottstein, Alon Goshen, 42
Gramsci, Antonio, 148
Grant, Jacquelyn, 190n7
Great Awakenings, 105
Great Chain of Being, 4, 176n62
Greeks, ancient
  influence on Christianity, 103–6, 110, 183n24
  reliance on slaves, 3
  see also Plato; platonization
Gregory of Nazianzus, 39
Griffith, Colleen, 43
Gutiérrez, Gustavo, 48
Gutmann, Amy, 190n12

Hagar, 12, 79, 83, 89–90, 91
Haight, Roger, 182n73
harmonious relationality
  Christian value, 106–19 *passim*, 171
  and equality, 113–14
  rooted in African concept of harmony, 111, 112–14
Harris, Art, 180n11
Harrison, Renee, 91–2
Harvey, Jennifer, 49, 187n69
Hayes, Diana, 10
Henderson, Mae, 63
Hennelly, Alfred, 48
heterosexism and homophobia
  in black Christian churches, as assimilation to white Christianity, 100, 101, 109
  and Christophobia, 124–5
  debate over, among black Christians, 99–100, 101–2
  need to abandon, 107, 109, 114, 151

  result of platonization, 99–119 *passim*
  silence about, in the black community, 101–2, 147
  see also homosexuality; LGBT people; platonization; sexuality
Hilkert, Mary Catherine, 46–7
HIV/AIDS, 101, 108, 146, 147, 152, 167
Hobgood, Mary Elizabeth, 49, 187n69
Holiday, Billie, 30
Holmes, Emily, 92–4, 181n68
homophobia, *see* heterosexism and homophobia
homosexuality
  Bible and, 102
  gift from God, 109
  and HIV/AIDS, 152
  and image of God, 109
  marriage debate, among black people, 99–100, 108–9, 182n1
  see also heterosexism and homophobia; LGBT people; sexual discourse of resistance; sexuality
hooks, bell, 33–4, 56
Hopkins, Dwight N., 44, 66
Hopson, Ronald E., 183n38
Hurston, Zora Neale, 6, 70–2
Hussey, Laura S., 180n2

image of God
  and beauty, 127–8
  in the Bible, 39, 41
  in black bodies, 118, 124, 158–9
  in black mothers, 92–5
  in black women, 60, 66, 72, 73, 92–7, 124, 165, 168, 177n27
  in bodies, 2, 6, 38–44, 126–8, 140–2, 161–72; *see also* bodies, human, differences, manifesting the image of God
  capacity for relationship, 42, 44–7
  caring for the oppressed, 45–7
  central to womanist ethics, 66, 70, 72
  cognitive faculty, 42, 44
  compelling resistance to/incompatible with racism, 35, 37, 44–7, 66, 73
  denied in black people (by whites), 22, 34
  dismantling evil, 157–9
  distinguished from "personhood," 44–5
  enacted uniquely by each person, 164–5
  and equality, 6
  ethical implications, in white theology, 45–7
  failing to prevent racism, 2, 6
  and Great Chain of Being, 176n62
  and incarnation, 94–5
  indestructible but occludable, 116–17, 164
  manifested passively and/or actively, 46–7, 94–5, 109, 117, 164
  in people who are oppressed, 46–7, 116
  in people who are powerful, 45–7, 131, 157–9
  restoration as salvation, 137
  and same-sex marriage, 109
  single or multiple human characteristic(s), 44–5
  in white theologies, 44–7
imago dei, *see* image of God
Imus, Don, 75
incarnation
  bodies as sites, 93–5
  and homosexual bodies, 124–5
  and image of God, 94–5
  in Jesus Christ, *see under* Jesus Christ
  and the Trinity, 94
  understood dualistically, 104
  warrant for bodily differences as image of God, 163
  and wilderness, 92–5
indentured servitude, 17–18, 22
Interrupting White Privilege (Laurie Cassidy and Alex Mikulich), 49
Iraq war, 148, 167–8
Isasi-Díaz, Ada María, 137

Jackson, Mattie, mother of, 132–3
Jesus Christ
  black Christ, 107–10, 116, 119, 161–2, 172
  body of: and black women's bodies, 123; and disabled bodies, 63–4; establishing goodness of bodies, 2–3, 107, 158; God's body, 42; and homosexual bodies, 124–5; and

Jesus Christ—*Continued*
  body of—*Continued*
    lynched bodies, 30; marked, 63–4, 121–42 *passim*; and oppressed bodies, 12; and solidarity, 121–42 *passim*; uniqueness, 164
  Christological paradox, 103–4, 107
  crucifying cross, 104–5, 107, 141, 162; *see also* Jesus Christ, suffering and death
  "disabled God," 63–4
  image of God, 45
  incarnation, 2–3, 38, 42, 45, 93, 107, 140, 158, 162
  ministry, 85, 108, 126
  resurrection, as repudiation of tragic death, 86, 108, 135, 141, 162
  sharing black women's struggle for freedom, 12, 140
  and solidarity, 108, 131–2, 133–5, 140–2
  Spirit Christology, 182n73
  suffering and death: caused by sin, 134–5; contrary to God's will, 131–5; lynching, 125, 132, 134–5, 141–2; redemptive sacrifice or surrogacy experience (Atonement), 85–7, 104–5, 107, 108, 131–2; solidarity, 131–2, 133–5, 140; *see also* Jesus Christ, crucifying cross
  see also incarnation; mystical body of Christ
Jim Crow, *see* segregation
John Paul II (Pope), 41
Johnson, Anna, 80–1, 89
Johnson, Elizabeth A., 41
Johnson v. Calvert, 80–1
Johnson, Walter, 174n12
Julian of Norwich, 40
justice, 129, 158, 159

Kant, Immanuel, 67–8
King, Martin Luther, Jr., 31, 32, 72, 141
Ku Klux Klan, 30, 175n51
  see also lynching

Las Casas, Bartolomé de, 18
Latin American liberation theology, 48, 150
Latino/a theologies, 8, 137–8
Lawrence-Lightfoot, Sara, 178n36, 179nn78–9, 180n81
Lee, Spike, 168
LGBT people, 82, 102, 116, 124–5
  see also heterosexism and homophobia; homosexuality; sexuality
Lonergan, Bernard, 124, 129, 136
Lorde, Audre, 62, 78
Luther, Martin, 40
lynching, 30, 36, 85, 104, 125, 132, 134–5, 141–2, 145, 175n52

Magubane, Zine, 75
Malcolm X, 31
Malcolm X (Spike Lee), 168
Mannix, Daniel P., 173n3, 174nn9–10, 175n43
Mantsio, Gregory, 179n47
Markens, Susan, 81, 180n10
Mary (mother of Jesus), 93
Mather, Cotton, 26
Matt, Hershel Jonah, 42
Mayflower, 17, 18
Mbiti, John, 111
McFarland, Ian, 44, 45, 95, 164, 176n15, 190n64
McIntosh, Peggy, 5
McWhorter, John, 143, 144
Middle Passage, 18–19, 112, 114
  see also Atlantic slave trade
Mikulich, Alex, 49, 189n32
monotheism
  African concept, 111
  closed, 103, 107, 112
  see also God, Christian; Trinity
Monroe, Irene, 102
Morrison, Toni, 6, 47, 63, 93, 124, 127, 140, 149, 187n105
Moss, Alfred A., Jr., 175n45, 175nn47–50, 175n54
mothers/motherhood, *see* black mothers; white mothers
mystical body of Christ, 45, 125, 128–31, 141, 166

Native American theologies, 8
Native peoples of the Americas, 8, 17, 18, 22, 182n78

Neubeck, Kenneth, 83, 180n1
Nilson, Jon, 37, 48, 49, 124
Nostra Aetate (Vatican II), 184n72

Obama, Barack, 5, 59, 143–4, 155, 157, 188n1
"oppressed-oppressor," 10
"option for the poor," 11
ordination, 43

Painter, Nell Irvin, 182n4
Papon, Ashley Michelle, 175n58
parents/parenthood, *see* black fathers; black mothers; white mothers
Paris, Peter, 111, 112, 113, 184n70, 184n72, 185n84
Parks, Rosa, 31
partus sequitur ventrem, 24, 57
patriarchy, 4, 43, 66, 113
  see also sexism
Paul
  speech to the Athenians, 111
  taking slavery for granted (letter to Philemon), 3, 18
  theology of the body, 39
  writings rejected by a former slave, 25
Perkinson, James W., 49, 50, 114, 115, 149, 153, 170, 187n69
Phan, Peter, 110
pigmentocracy, 60–1
Pinn, Anthony, 10, 102
Plato, 103, 104
platonization, 12, 99–119, 168
  devaluing human bodies, 118
  development, 103–6
  eliminating, 106–19
  and homophobia, 101–2
  limited benefits for black Christians, 105–6
  see also dualism
Plessy v. Ferguson, 30
Pollack, Jeff, 33
"post-racial era," 143–4, 159
power
  of black people, in black churches, 59
  black women's, 67, 88–9
  white abuse of, 4, 43, 105, 115, 116–17, 166, 168
  white need to subvert/relinquish, 36, 67, 168, 170
  white theologians' ignorance of, 46–7
Pramuk, Christopher, 186n39
prejudice, *see* heterosexism and homophobia; racism; sexism; white supremacy
Prince, Mary, 53–5, 56, 57–8, 67, 68, 73

Raboteau, Albert, 24, 25, 111, 112, 174n23, 174nn28–31, 175n39
race
  and adoption preferences, 81–2
  concept: denied by white people, 149; outcome of Atlantic slave trade, 20; used to justify slavery, 17, 149
  and disability, 63–4, 180n19
  "post-racial era," 143–4, 159
  and reproductive surrogacy, 81–2
  social (not biological) reality, 148, 188n28
  see also racism
racism
  affecting many racial and ethnic groups, 5, 15
  bias, 124
  Christian problem, 2–6, 38
  denial of image of God, 37
  denied by white people, 35
  and the election of President Barack Obama, 143–4
  harmful to white people, 35, 121–2, 166
  and the health-care system, 146, 152
  heresy, 37
  incompatible with Christianity, 37, 73, 130, 168; *see also* white people/white Christians, need to confront racism
  intractable problem, 6, 32
  and patriarchy, 43
  personal, 4–5
  "post-racial era," 143–4, 159
  sin, 37, 38, 133
  strategies for resisting, 36, 49–51, 76, 97–8, 118–19, 136–42, 149–59, 161–72
  structural/social, 5, 38, 143–4

racism—*Continued*
  theological problem, 37–51
  toll on people of color, 15, 152
  white need to confront, *see* white people/white Christians, need to confront racism
  white problem, 15–36, 167
  in white theology and ethics, 47–51, 149
  and wilderness, 96
  see also colorism; race; white privilege; white supremacy
"racism without racists," 5
Rahner, Karl, 130
Reconstruction, 28–30, 58, 145
resurrection (of the body)
  and disability/disfigurement, 63–4
  and image of God, 42–3
  liberation of our desires, 125
  repudiation of tragic death, 86, 108, 135, 141, 162
Riggs, Marcia, 147, 179n53, 183n14
Risher, Dee Dee, 178n17, 179n48, 179n51
Roberts, Dorothy, 82, 83
Robertson, Campbell, 188n3
Rodríguez, Rubén Rosario, 5, 185n90
Ruether, Rosemary Radford, 41
Ryan, Maura, 180n12

Samuelson, Tracey D., 189n60
Sanders, Cheryl J., 100
"Sapphire," 147, 150–1, 156–7
segregation, 6, 30, 31, 32, 58–9, 121–2
"separate but equal," 30, 31
  see also segregation
sexism, 10, 43, 59, 65–6, 90, 113, 151
  see also patriarchy
sexual discourse of resistance, 107–10 *passim*
sexuality, 101–2, 104–6, 107, 113, 146–7
  see also bodies, black, seen as hypersexualized (by Europeans); homosexuality
Shange, Ntozake, 73–4
sharecropping, 29, 58
Sheppard, Phillis, 177n27, 179n77
sin
  and bodies, 39
  cause of Jesus's death, 86, 134–5, 141
  cause of suffering, 133
  and homosexuality, 101
  lamenting, 153
  of oppressed people, 5, 117
  slavery, 26
  white association with blackness, 105–6
  white supremacy and racism, 13, 37–8, 48–9, 50, 66, 97, 108, 114, 133, 139
Sisters in the Wilderness (Delores S. Williams), 77–98 *passim*
slavery
  accepted/supported by Christianity, 2, 4, 18
  in Africa, 19–20, 112–13
  attack on image of God, 127
  and baptism, 25
  in Bible, 3, 102
  black bodies seen as inferior/"animals," 22–7, 127
  black women marked by, 62–3
  black women's situation, 55–8, 79, 87–8
  claimed by Europeans to be beneficial to Africans, 24
  and colorism, 60–1, 153
  condemned as sinful by abolitionists, 26
  defended by Europeans as a "positive good," 26–7
  defended by Thomas R.R. Cobb, 53–4
  dividing mind and body, 21–2, 127
  economic enterprise, 17–22, 23
  established gradually over time, 17–18
  European enterprise, 18–19
  exploiting women and men differently, 23–4, 56–7
  foundational to United States, 4
  and harmony, 112–14
  institution, 22–7
  marriages of enslaved people, 25
  part of human society, 3
  permanent/hereditary condition, 23–4, 27
  psychological effects on slaves, 21, 23, 53–4

  race as justification for, 17, 149
  racialization of, 22–3, 24
  resistance to, 84, 90, 113
  social death ("saltwater slavery"), 112
  white people responsible for legacy, 156
  and wilderness, 92–3
  see also Atlantic slave trade; domestic slave markets; Middle Passage
slave trade, *see* Atlantic slave trade; domestic slave markets; Middle Passage; slavery
Smallwood, Stephanie, 112, 113
Smith, Abraham, 109, 183n16
Sobrino, Jon, 86, 135
Soelle, Dorothee, 132
solidarity
  difficulty of, for white people, 139–40, 156–7, 166–7, 169
  divine decision and command, 134–5
  embodied, 140, 140–2
  image of God, 46
  Jesus's suffering and death as, 134–5
  with oppressed/suffering bodies, 12, 121–42, 166–71
  and mystical body of Christ, 128–31
  repudiation of suffering, 108, 132, 140–2
  with victims: priority over "rescuing the killers," 153; as salvation, 12, 86, 141–2, 162–3, 166–72
  and white liberation, 140–2
stance analysis, 137
stereotypes, *see* black people, stereotypes of; black women, stereotypes of
"Strange Fruit" (Billie Holiday), 30
strangers, Christian ambivalence toward, 3–4
Stuart, Elizabeth, 63
suffering
  black women's, during slavery, 56–8
  black women's responses, 132–3
  bodies, central to theology, 123–4
  contrary to God's will, 131–5, 141–2, 165
  ethical approaches, 69–70
  as a gift from God, 40
  and image of God, 45–7, 162, 165
  of Jesus, 85–7; *see also* Jesus Christ, suffering and death
  of Korean women, 86
  of Native people, 18
  redemptive, *see under* Jesus Christ, suffering and death
  resisting as salvation, 141–2, 162–3, 166–72
  theology of, 131–5
  as a virtue, 69–70
  widespread, 8
  womanist theology of, 132–3
  see also black women, suffering; Jesus Christ, suffering and death; solidarity; surrogacy
surrogacy, 11–12, 77–98 *passim*
  and adoption, 81–2
  black women's experiences of, in United States, 79–87
  "coerced," 79
  as concrete body experience, 87
  and fetal tissue alienability, 82–3
  honored but not glorified, 86
  and Jesus's death, 85–7
  reproductive (in contemporary U.S. society), 80–4
  resistance, as imaging God, 94–5
  "voluntary," 79–80
survival (as a virtue), 68–72, 73
survival/quality-of-life struggle, *see under* black women
Sweeney, Meghan, 94

Tanner, Kathryn, 45–7, 176n15
Tatum, Beverly Daniel, 5, 173n6, 173n9, 190n13
Teevan, Donna, 177n20
Teresa of Ávila, 40
Terrell, Joanne Marie, 85–6
Their Eyes Were Watching God (Zora Neale Hurston), 72
theologians of color
  confronting white supremacy, 37–8
  starting point for dealing with theological racism, 50–1
  see also black theology/theologians; ethics, womanist; womanist theology/theologians; *see also under individual theologians*

theological anthropology
  and bodies, 38–44, 125–6, 161–72
  compelling resistance of racism/solidarity with marked bodies, 13, 125–42, 161–72
  of Delores S. Williams, 94
  and equality, 6
  expanded/revisioned by womanist ethics/theology, 158–9, 162, 171–2
  and freedom, 140–1
  and image of God, 44–7, 158–9, 161–72
  of M. Shawn Copeland, 7, 12, 123–36, 140–2
  need for shift toward positive view of bodies, 13
  rooted in Jesus and the Spirit, 94
  see also bodies, black; bodies, black women's; bodies, human; image of God
Theology of Liberation, A (Gustavo Gutiérrez), 48
Theology of the Body, The (John Paul II), 41
Thrasher, Sue, 121, 123
Trinity, The (Augustine of Hippo), 39–40
Thomas Aquinas, 9, 115, 164
Three-Fifths Compromise, 27, 56
Thurman, Howard, 25, 72
Tillich, Paul, 72
Townes, Emilie M., 12, 132, 143–59, 161–71 *passim,* 180n8, 182n10
Trinity, 94, 106, 112, 158, 164
truth-telling (as a virtue), 67–8, 69, 70, 169
Tuskegee syphilis experiment, 146

uninterrogated coloredness, 148–51, 153–7
  see also cultural production of evil; fantastic hegemonic imagination
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 37
"Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" (Peggy McIntosh), 5

Venezia, Todd, 180n21
Voting Rights Act, 32

Walker, Alice, 6, 61, 61–2, 88, 91, 92, 100, 156, 169–70, 179n65, 185n11, 190n19
Washington, Mary Helen, 61, 127, 178n33
welfare, 77, 80, 83
Wells-Barnett, Ida B., 152, 175n52
West, Traci C., 101, 102, 150
Wheatley, Phillis, 66–7
white Christian churches
  complicit in racism/white supremacy, 2, 114
  ordination, 43
  redeemable from platonization, 114–17
  worship services, 99, 117
  see also platonization; white people/white Christians
white Christians, *see* white Christian churches; white culture; white people/white Christians
white culture
  built on "uninterrogated coloredness," 153
  detrimental to black health, 151
  development of concept, 17, 101
  imperialist tendencies, 115, 182n77, 182n79
  Western culture, as foundation, 3–4; *see also* Greeks, ancient
  see also white Christian churches; white people/white Christians
white faith tradition, *see* white Christian churches
white feminist theology/theologians, 7, 9, 41, 44, 91, 115, 150, 173n15
  see also under individual theologians
white mothers, 77–8, 97–8
"whiteness," 17, 101, 182n77
  see also white culture; white people/white Christians
white people/white Christians
  believing in black inferiority, 19, 21, 174n13; *see also* bodies, black, seen as inferior (by Europeans)
  in black churches, 171–2
  bodies: failing to image God, 166; need to decenter, 136, 140

and civil rights movement: declining to participate, 121, 123; participating, 31, 121–2, 141; resisting, 31–2
creating and perpetuating racism, 16, 167, 168
denying humanity of black people, 34–6, 53–4
denying image of God in black people, 34
denying own prejudices, 154–7
denying significance of class divisions, 64–5
difficulty of subverting white privilege, 170, 177n35
dismantling the cultural production of evil (interrogating coloredness), 153–9
entertained by negative stereotypes, 34
founders of Atlantic slave trade, 4
failing to image God, 164, 166, 168
failing to see black women as women, 61–2
fear of black people after Emancipation, 29
ignorant of white privilege/oppressor status, 5, 7, 54, 136, 140, 148–9, 165, 168
imaging God, 45–7, 74, 131, 140–2, 157–9, 161–72; *see also* racism, strategies for resisting
and lynching, 30
misunderstanding black motherhood, 77–8, 95–7
need to confront racism: as Christians, 2, 13, 15–16, 32, 34–6, 74, 118–19, 129, 136–42, 157–9, 161–72; as white, 15, 34–6, 74, 128, 130–1, 135, 144–5, 148–51, 151–2, 153–7, 161–72
responsible for wilderness as hostile society, 95–7
thwarting image of God in black women, 96
unable to imagine racism's toll on people of color, 15
unintentional racists, 155
uninterrogated coloredness, 148–51, 153–7; *see also* fantastic hegemonic imagination
whiteness, as social construction, 149, 153–4
working toward solidarity, 136–42
see also bodies, human; racism; white Christian churches; white culture; white mothers; white privilege; white supremacy
white privilege, 5, 49–51, 117, 138, 149, 170, 177n35
  see also racism; white supremacy
white supremacy, 5, 8, 30, 37–8, 48–51, 97, 117, 124, 126, 132–3, 140
  see also racism; white privilege
White Theology (James W. Perkinson), 149
white theology/theologians
  addressing racism and white supremacy, 49–51
  antiracist message of, and danger of abuse of power, 170, 177n35
  and black theology of liberation, 48–51
  complicit in structural racism, 47
  failure to challenge racism, 164
  ignorant of own privilege, 47, 48, 136
  on image of God, 44–7
  and Latin American liberation theology, 48
  need to attend to theologians of color, 117, 169
  need to confront racism, 37–8, 44, 47–51, 74–6, 154
  need to decenter white bodies, 136, 140
  racist, 47–51
  studying and/or advocating womanist theologies, 9–11, 50–1, 170
  using countermemory, 158
  see also ethics, conventional; white feminist theology/theologians*; see also under individual theologians*
wilderness, 92–8, 182n78
Williams, Delores S., 11–12, 77–98, 108, 134, 161–71 *passim*, 173n18
Williams, Patricia J., 84

Wise, Tim, 138, 139, 167, 170, 190n11, 190n13
womanist, 7, 9, 173n13, 173n15, 185n11
womanist dancing mind, 149–50, 158
womanist ethics/ethicists, *see* ethics, womanist
womanist theology/theologians
  on bodies as critical factor in society, 7
  challenging Christianity's denigration of bodies, 8
  concerned with human values, 9
  of embodiment, 177n27
  on the image of God, 47–8, 66, 72, 92, 94–5, 109, 116, 122, 124, 126–8, 162, 164
  "interdisciplinary," 7
  introduced/defined, 6–9
  "oppressed-oppressor" status, 170
  reconstructing theology of the body, 6–9, 13, 162
  starting point for dealing with racism, 6–9, 13, 50–1, 167
  on suffering, 132–3
  survivalist rather than liberationist, 89–92
  see also ethics, womanist; womanist; *see also under individual theologians*
women, black, *see* black mothers; black people; black women
women's movement, 58–9, 62
Wright, Richard, 89

10.1057/9780230114715 - Racism and the Image of God, Karen Teel