

long horizon of hope in a new age to come. What the heuristic of paradise-as-this-life offers us is a way to describe salvation, not just in terms of what we are against and what we need liberation from, but in terms of what we love, what binds us to each other, and what gives us joy. It softens the searing eschatological arrow of time with an immediacy compelling us to be present to a sanctified world. It allows us to speak of justice without relying on narratives of exodus and conquest or of exile and return, and enables us to tell the truth about the ambiguous history of Christianity in North America, including its unethical relationship to land as well as people. It leads us to liturgical practices that honor the power of our bodies, our visions, and our dreams and the presence of the dead in our lives, practices that embrace the great cloud of witnesses, our ancestors, in their religious, moral, and ethnic complexity.

The divine powers that deliver salvation are love for the beautiful, care for the material life that gives pleasure, nourishment, and joy, respect for the numinous world, reverence for the Spirit in life, and embrace of the eros that empowers human beings as social creatures to seek life in just communities. These powers are elusive, fleeting, and stubbornly persistent. They ground the struggle for justice and the journey to God in a response to the gift of life in this world. They encourage a responsibility for the common good motivated, not out of suffering, guilt, and selflessness, but out of gratitude, generosity, and joy.

Decolonizing Theology

ANDREA SMITH

Robert Warrior's "Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians," is a germinal critique of the underpinnings of liberation theology. In this essay, Warrior argues that the bible is not a liberatory text for Native peoples, especially considering the fact that the liberation motif commonly adopted by liberation theologians—the Exodus—is premised on the genocide of the indigenous people occupying the Promised Land—the Canaanites. Warrior does not argue for the historical veracity of the conquest of the Canaanites. Rather, the Exodus operates as a *narrative* of Conquest—a narrative that was foundational to the European conquest of the Americas. Warrior's essay points not only to the problems with the Exodus motif, but to liberation theology's conceptualization of a God of deliverance. He contends that "as long as people believe in the Yahweh of deliverance, the world will not be safe from the Yahweh the conqueror.¹ That is, by conceptualizing ourselves as oppressed peoples who are to be delivered at all costs, we necessarily become complicit in oppressing those who stand in the way of our deliverance. Instead, Warrior argues, we need to reconceptualize ourselves as "a society of people delivered from oppression who are not so afraid of becoming victims again that they become oppressors themselves."²

His work further developed the analysis of Vine Deloria, Jr., who argues that liberation theology fails to consider its complicity in Christian imperialism. While the premise of liberation theology is that Christianity can be redeemed if articulated from a liberation paradigm, Deloria argues that Christianity is inextricably linked to imperialism.

1. Robert Warrior, "Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians," *Natives and Christians*, ed. James Treat (New York: Routledge, 1996), 93–100.

2. Robert Warrior, "Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians," *Natives and Christians*, ed. James Treat (New York: Routledge, 1996), 93–100.

Consequently, Deloria raises the question if, in attempting to “redeem” Christianity, liberation theology is essentially a colonial discourse disguised within the language of liberation. His contention is that liberation theology is grounded on a Western European epistemological framework that is no less oppressive to Native communities than is mainstream theology. “Liberation theology,” Deloria cynically argues, “was an absolute necessity if the establishment was going to continue to control the minds of minorities. If a person of a minority group had not invented it, the liberal establishment most certainly would have created it.”³ According to Deloria, Native liberation must be grounded in indigenous epistemologies—epistemologies which are inconsistent with Western epistemologies, of which liberation theology is a part. “If we are then to talk seriously about the necessity of liberation, we are talking about the destruction of the whole complex of Western theories of knowledge and the construction of a new and more comprehensive synthesis of human knowledge and experience.”⁴

The challenge brought forth by Native scholars/activists to other liberation theologians would be—even if we distinguish the “liberation” church from mainstream churches—can any church escape complicity in Christian imperialism? Deloria, in particular, raises the challenge that Christianity—because it is a temporally, rather than a spatially, based tradition (that is, it is not tied to a particular landbase, but can seek converts from any landbase)—is necessarily a religion tied to imperialism. Thus, Christianity will never be content to remain within a particular place or community. Rather, adherents of temporal-based religions will try to convince other peoples of the veracity of their religious truth claims. “Once religion becomes specific to a group, its nature also appears to change, being directed to the internal mechanics of the group, not to grandiose schemes of world conquest.”⁵ Hence, all Christian theology, even liberation theology, remains complicit in the missionization and genocide of Native peoples in the Americas.

In this essay, I will explore the implications of Warrior’s analysis for social justice organizing and liberation theology. How has “Canaanite” ideology informed colonial practice both in the U.S. and globally? How has this ideology been internalized *within* liberation theologies? And finally, are there alternative formations of liberation theology that might stand outside “Canaanite” ideology?

3. Vine Deloria, *For This Land* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 100.

4. Deloria, *For This Land*, 106.

5. Vine Deloria, *God is Red* (Delta: New York, 1973), 296–297.

Canaanites and Native Peoples

Albert Cave, H.C. Porter, and others have demonstrated that Christian colonizers often envisioned Native peoples as Canaanites, worthy of mass destruction.⁶ As an example, George Henry Lokey wrote in 1794,

The human behavior of the governor at Pittsburgh greatly incensed those people, who according to the account given in the former Part of this history, represented the Indians as Canaanites, who without mercy ought to be destroyed from the face of the earth, and considered America as the land of promise given to the Christians.⁷

This Canaanite mythology undergirds U.S. contemporary Indian law. A common complaint among colonizers was that indigenous peoples, being savage “Canannites,” did not properly subdue the earth. For instance, governor John Winthrop of Massachusetts Bay declared that “America fell under the legal rubric of *vacuum domicilium* because the Indians had not ‘subdued’ it and therefore had only a ‘natural’ and not a ‘civil’ right to it.”⁸ George E. Ellis (1880) echoed: “the Indians simply wasted everything within their reach. . . . They required enormous spaces of wilderness for their mode of existence.”⁹ Walter Prescott Webb reasoned that free land was “land free to be taken.”¹⁰ This reasoning became the colonizer’s legal basis for appropriating land from Native peoples. This notion that Native peoples, as savage “Canaanites”, did not properly use land and hence, had no title to it, forms the basis of the “doctrine of discovery” on which most U.S. case law is based.

This principle as articulated in *Johnson and Graham’s Lessee v. William McIntosh* (1823) held that the United States by right of “discovery” holds “exclusive right to extinguish the Indian title of occupancy, either by purchase or conquest.” According to the Supreme Court, “the title by conquest is acquired and maintained by force. The conquer prescribes its limits.”¹¹ What is the justification for conquest then?

6. Albert Cave, “Canaanites in a Promised Land,” *American Indian Quarterly* Fall (1988): 277–297; H.C. Porter, *The Inconstant Savage* (London: Gerlad Duckworth & Co., 1979); Ronald Sanders, *Lost Tribes and Promised Lands* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1978); Djelai Kadir, *Columbus and the Ends of the Earth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

7. David Wrone and Russel Nelson, eds., *Who’s the Savage?* (Malabar: Robert Krieger Publishing, 1982), 68.

8. Francis Jennings, *Invasion of the Americas* (New York: Norton, 1975), 82.

9. Jennings, *Invasion of the Americas*, 84.

10. Jennings, *Invasion of the Americas*, 84.

11. Francis Paul Prucha, ed., *Documents of United States Indian Policy*, 2nd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 35.

The tribes of Indians inhabiting this country were fierce savages, whose occupation was war, and whose subsistence was drawn chiefly from the forest. To leave them in possession of their country, was to leave the country a wilderness.¹²

The courts did not rule that Native peoples had no claim to land at all, rather, they had no right to transfer land to another party. "It has never been contended, that the Indian title amounted to nothing. Indian inhabitants are to be considered merely as occupants, to be protected, indeed while in peace, in the possession of their lands, but to be deemed incapable of transferring the absolute title to others."¹³ And certainly, even today, colonizers justify the theft of Native lands on the grounds that Native peoples did not or do not properly control or subdue nature. For instance, among the Christian Right, John Eidsmoe contends that Christians never stole Indian land. He argues that since Native people did not privatize land, and since there communities had not been "established by God," then Europeans had a right to seize the land from them.¹⁴ And furthermore, while Christianity may have been forced on Native people, "millions of people are in heaven today as a result."¹⁵ And as Pat Robertson states:

These tribes are . . . in an arrested state of social development. They are not less valuable as human beings because of that, but they offer scant wisdom or learning or philosophical vision that can be instructive to a society that can feed the entire population of the earth in a single harvest and send spacecraft to the moon. . . . Except for our crimes, our wars and our frantic pace of life, what we have is superior to the ways of primitive peoples. . . . Which life do you think people would prefer: freedom in an enlightened Christian civilization or the suffering of subsistence living and superstition in a jungle? You choose.¹⁶

Even today, social justice organizing often does not want to come to grips with the fact that the United States is a colonial project that is premised on the genocide of Native peoples. Much of the current anti-war movement never calls into question the legitimacy of the U.S. with its slogans like, "Peace is patriotic." Particularly popular since 9/11 is much organizing work to combat "decline in civil liberties." The subtext of

12. Prucha, ed., *Documents of United States Indian Policy*, 2nd ed., 36.

13. Prucha, ed., *Documents of United States Indian Policy*, 2nd ed., 37.

14. John Eidsmoe, *Columbus and Cortez: Conquerors for Christ* (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Press, 1992), 133.

15. Eidsmoe, *Columbus and Cortez*, 140.

16. Pat Robertson, *The Turning Tide* (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 153.

much of this work is that the Bush administration signals a decline in the democratic ideals that can be found in the U.S. constitution. The proper aim, then, of social activists, according to this logic, is that we must restore the U.S. government back to its original democratic ideals located in its founding documents such as the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

However, in looking to the U.S. Constitution as basis for our democratic "ideals", one is immediately struck with many contradictions, including the fact the slaves are deemed 3/5 of a person. Generally speaking, however, liberal discourse (and even many sectors of "radical" discourse) dismisses these contradictions as aberrations from otherwise admirable democratic ideals.¹⁷ In other words, white supremacy, genocide, and imperialism are unfortunate mistakes made by the U.S., but do not fundamentally constitute the U.S. itself.

On closer inspection, however, it becomes clear that white supremacy, colonialism and economic exploitation are inextricably linked to U.S. democratic ideals rather than aberrations from it. The "freedom" guaranteed to some individuals in society has always been premised upon the radical unfreedom of others. Very specifically, the United States could not exist without the genocide of indigenous peoples, otherwise visitors to this continent would be living under the sphere of indigenous forms of governance rather than under U.S. empire. Thus, to the extent that progressives continue to legitimize the continued existence of the U.S. is the extent to which they sanction the genocide of indigenous peoples living in the borders of the U.S. In fact, it is a consistent practice among progressives to bemoan the genocide of Native peoples but then to implicitly sanction it by refusing to question the legitimacy of the settler nation responsible for this genocide in the interest of political expediency. It is incumbent upon all peoples who benefit from living on Native lands to consider how they can engage in social justice struggles without constantly selling out Native peoples in the interest of political expediency *in the short-term*. I say short-term, because expecting that we can fundamentally challenge white supremacy, imperialism, and economic exploitation within the structures of U.S. colonialism and empire *in the long-term* is fundamentally nonsensical.

The Canaanites and Palestine

Canaanite ideology informs the colonization of peoples, not only in the United States, but around the world. It would be remiss to assess the

17. Carl Boggs, *The End of Politics* (New York: Guilford Press, 2000), 185.

role of the bible as a narrative of conquest without addressing its relationship to the ideology of Zionism, particularly Christian Zionism, and the colonization of Palestine. While Zionism has many competing definitions, for this paper, I am defining Zionism as the ideology that holds that the nation-state of Israel should be defined as a racially Jewish state. Particularly since 9/11, the theology of Christian Zionism that calls on the expulsion of Palestinians from their homelands to make way for the state of Israel defined as an exclusively Jewish state has dominated evangelical and even some forms of liberal Christian thought. In mainstream discourse, the situation of Palestine is generally depicted as an "Arab-Jewish" conflict or a religious conflict. This discourse masks the colonial nature of the Israeli state. As Ella Shohat, an Arab Jewish scholar, argues, while Zionism claims itself a discourse about the liberation of *all* Jewish people, the Zionist project has in fact centered around European Jewish people specifically, to the expense of Jewish people that were already living in the area.

Zionism claims to be a liberation movement for all Jews, and Zionist ideologies have spared no effort in their attempt to make the two terms "Jewish" and "Zionist" virtually synonymous. In fact, however, Zionism has been primarily a liberation movement for European Jews (and that, we know, problematically) and more precisely that tiny minority of European Jews actually settled in Israel. Although Zionism claims to provide a homeland for all Jews, that homeland was not offered to all with the same largess. Sephardi Jews were first brought to Israel for specific European-Zionist reasons, and once there they were systematically discriminated against by a Zionism that deployed its energies and material resources differentially, to the consistent advantage of European Jews and to the consistent detriment of Oriental Jews.¹⁸

Shohat further discusses how Zionists forcibly displaced Arab Jews from their homelands, such as in Iraq. In fact, Israeli Zionists bombed the Mas'ouda Shemtob Synagogue in Baghdad in 1951 to create hysteria among Iraqi Jews and catalyze their mass exodus to Israel. She notes, "the same historical process that dispossessed Palestinians of their property, land, and national-political rights was linked to the process that dispossessed Sephardim of their property, lands, and rootedness in Arab

18. Ella Shohat, "Separdim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of its Jewish Victims," *Dangerous Liaisons*, eds. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 39.

countries."¹⁹ Her point is not to juxtapose good Sephardim with bad Ashkenazim, but to unmask the racializing logic behind Zionism that, far from liberating all Jewish people, has oppressed Arab Jewish people as well as Palestinians (although not to the same extent).

In addition, if one defines a nation-state on racially-defined criteria, one must necessarily create a racial apartheid state to exclude the peoples living on the same lands that do not meet the racial criteria. It is telling that many of the progressive sectors of the Palestinian liberation struggle call for, not a two-state solution which would require two nation-states to be built on racially exclusionary criteria, but for one secular state that respects the human rights of all its inhabitants. In order to defend a racially apartheid state, Zionism articulates Palestinians as "Canaanites" who deserve conquest.

This language was evident at the recent Interfaith Zionist Leadership Summit held in Washington, D.C (May 17-18, 2003). Sponsors included the National Unity Coalition for Israel, African American Women's Clergy Association, Christian Coalition, Jewish Action Alliance, the Episcopal-Jewish Alliance, and the Jewish Political Education Foundation. According to Joseph Puder, Director of the American Jewish Congress Interfaith Task Force for America and Israel, the Muslim world has not undergone the reformation that Jews and Christians did that would enable them to adopt democracy, human rights, and women's rights [who knew that the Christian Right was such a staunch supporter of women's rights?!]. Thomas Neumann, Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs, argued that some people think the problem we face is "radical" Islam, but the problem is in fact Islam. Most Muslims are anti-American and anti-Israel. Charles Jacob who promotes Zionism on college campuses through the Davis Project offered the following power point presentation to explain the difference between Israelis Jews and "Arabs/Palestinians."

Israel	Arab/Palestine
Teach kids songs of peace	Teach kids songs of hate. Sesame Street is about being a suicide bomber
Every effort to prevent civilian death	Kill lots of civilizations
Anguish when civilians hurt	Dancing when atrocities happen
Mothers don't want kids to fight	Mothers celebrate fighting

He summed up his presentation with, I grieve for Palestinian people

19. Shohat, "Separdim in Israel," 48.

who have leaders that succumbed to evil, and have fallen prey because of their "perceived sense of oppression." They are filling their children with hate and death. Helen Freedman, Americans for a Safe Israel, then declared that "Those who are with Israel are with God." However, she argued that there is no room to negotiate with Arab peoples because they are "religiously" motivated. There will only be peace, Freedman argued, when Arabs love their children as much as they hate us. But, she said Arabs are simply incapable of loving their children.

Many speakers, such as Freedman and Michael Leeden of the American Enterprise Institute, contended that U.S. colonialism or economic imperialism is not a factor in why there may be resentment against the U.S. from Arab countries. Rather, the true reason is "hatred, pure hatred." According to Leeden, what unites all Arab countries is tyranny. They hate the U.S. not because of our policies, but because "we" are democratic and believe in liberty. The only thing Arabs want is the defeat of the U.S.—so it doesn't matter what stance the U.S. takes on any particular issue. They have to come after us because their people see what a "bastion of freedom" we are, and they fear us, because their people would much rather live in our society than in theirs. The political platform proffered at this conference was the expulsion of all Palestinians into Jordan. Actually, according to the speakers, there are no such peoples as Palestinians; they are all simply Arabs who have no claim to the land Israel currently occupies. In that sense, this Zionist ideology mirrors the colonial ideology of conquest in the Americas—there were no people in the Americas in this "virgin territory." Speakers also advocated that the U.S. topple Syria, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and destroy the Palestinian Authority.

At the conference, this "two state" solution was articulated in a flyer from Americans for a Safe Israel.

Two State Solution—Israel—Jordan

Underlying concepts:

- a) All people are entitled to a national land
- b) The Arabs held in refugee camps are the only people who have remained unsettled in the land of their people since WWII.
- c) Israel is a Jewish land by religious, historical and security fiat.
- d) Jordan, although once comprising part of the Biblical Land of Israel and Balfour's Palestine, now contains an Arab-Palestinian state whose population is over 70% Palestinian, and as there is no Palestinian language, religion or culture, those in Israel will be a home in Jordan or any Arab nation

What is to be done?

- A. Refugee camps are to be closed, and those who have endured its horrors are now free to resettle in Jordan or other Arab countries, which will welcome them and where they share a common culture. This course would be shared by all those designed as refugees.
- B. Those living within Judea, Samaria, and Gaza will be offered a financial inducement by buying their property, etc. if they choose to resettle.
- C. Those remaining within Israel will be declared citizens of Jordan with the appropriate legal steps taken so that they remain within Israel and loyal to Israel law.

Another flyer from the same organization offered:

What we stand for:

- Jerusalem is the eternal and exclusive capitol of the sovereign Jewish State.
- The entire Land of Israel belongs to the Jewish People, alone.
- There is no "Palestine" and there is no "Palestinian People."
- The Arabs are not seeking a real peace; their goal is the destruction of Israel.
- The nations of the world must not attempt to force Israel into making suicidal territorial concessions.
- Israel must always maintain the ability to militarily defend itself and protect its own vital interests.
- Israel must return to the Biblical values that guided the Jewish People throughout its history.
- Israel must continue to develop as a nation with a vibrant free-market economy.
- Terrorist organizations, and the rogue nations that support them, must be destroyed.

According to Daniel Pipes of the Middle East Forum, there can be no "quick fix" solution through peace road maps. It is a war; one side will win and one side will lose. Israelis must defeat the Palestinians. Ledeen similarly argued that war is the natural state of humankind. The only time there is peace is when the winners (which are the U.S. and Israel) impose the terms of peace on those who have been defeated. We have to topple Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Syria, stated Ledeen, so then we can go to the Palestinians and ask what they really want. "If you want peace, we're with you, but if you want to drive Jews into the sea and absorb it into a greater Palestine, then you're next."

Pipe's assessment that anti-Zionists who critique the state of Israel, therefore, want to "drive Jews into the sea" and expel Jewish people from

the area, reflects the common assumption that anti-Zionism is equal to anti-Semitism. Of course, there are people who are both anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic. However, this simplistic analysis fails to consider the interests of those who are ultimately benefiting from this colonial situation—Western Christian nations, particularly the United States. As Tariq Ali and Colin Chapman demonstrate, the creation of Israel was the means by which European powers were able to extend the British mandate and hence Western economic interests over the area under guise of addressing anti-Semitism.²⁰ The United States has continued this British mandate by supporting Israel to maintain U.S. interests in the area. Anti-Semitism is as real today as it was when the state of Israel was created. However, Zionism, the notion that Israel should be a Jewish-only state to the exclusion of its Palestinian inhabitants, is a natural corollary rather than an antidote to anti-Semitism. That is, Zionism allows *Christian* powers to use the pretense of addressing anti-Semitism through supporting the state of Israel to actually support the interests of European and U.S. Christian nation-states. Countless scholars and activists have documented how the U.S. uses Israel to support its imperial interests in the Middle East.²¹ While I will not rehearse these arguments, I will give one small example of the relationship between Zionism and Christian imperialism. Israel's Ministry of Tourism puts out a 40-page advertisement in a conservative, evangelical Christian magazines called *The Holy Land* to recruit evangelicals to tour Israel. The slogan of the magazine directed to evangelicals is "No one belongs here more than you."²²

In addition, the assumption behind the equation anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism is that state violence (in this case in the form of the state of Israel) can liberate oppressed peoples (in this case Jewish people). Building on Warrior's analysis, we can see that if oppressed groups view themselves as groups that need to be "delivered" at any cost, then the assumption that results from this analysis is that these groups should fight for a nation-state that can defend their national interests over and above other's interests. An indigenous-centered analysis, by contrast, should encourage us to further question why we think the goal of a liberation struggle should be a nation-state—a system based on organized violence. Questioning this premise allows us to free our political imagi-

20. Tariq Ali, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms* (London: Verso, 2002); Colin Chapman, *Whose Promised Land?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 2002).

21. For more information, see Global Exchange's website on divestment from Israel - <http://www.globalexchange.org/countries/palestine/divestment.html>.

22. See website: <http://www.goisrael.com/missions/>

nation to begin thinking of how we can begin to build a world in which we would actually want to live. Such a political project is particularly important for colonized peoples seeking national liberation because it allows us to differentiate "nation" from "nation-state." As I have argued elsewhere, the theories of indigenous feminist activists provide an alternative vision of self-determination.²³ Helpful in this project of imagination is the work of Native women activists who have begun articulating notions of nation and sovereignty which are separate from nation-states. Whereas nation-states are governed through domination and coercion, indigenous sovereignty and nationhood is predicated on interrelatedness and responsibility. Thus, the issue is not, should Jewish people OR Palestinian peoples reside in Palestine—it is what forms of governance there and everywhere else we can create based on interdependence and cooperation rather than violence and denomination.

Canaanite Ideology in Liberation Theology

Warrior's analysis suggests that the situation in Palestine is emblematic of a larger problem that all oppressed communities face: the tendency to see themselves only as oppressed and not as oppressors as well. Frances Wood has concluded based on this problem that we must question a common precept in liberation theology: that God sides with the oppressed. Such an approach, she argues does not address the reality that there is not a simple dichotomy between oppressors and oppressed peoples. Rather, there are multiple axes of oppression; consequently those that are oppressed on one axis may well be oppressive on another axis. Consequently, she argues, it is more appropriate to say that God stands against oppression, rather than sides with the oppressed.²⁴

Similarly, Rita Nakashima Brock argues that this notion that God sides with the oppressed has created a myth of innocence for oppressed communities. In order to have our issues about oppression heard, we are often forced to portray ourselves as innocent of acts of oppression. The complete aversion to discussing community problems in the presence of outsiders ultimately undermines the community's struggle by equating, albeit implicitly, oppression and innocence. Unless a community can

23. Andrea Smith, *Bible, Gender and Nationalism in American Indian and Christian Right Activism*, Dissertation - (Santa Cruz: University of California-Santa Cruz, 2002).

24. Frances Wood, Lecture, Woman-Church Gathering, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1993.

prove itself unstained by vice, the reasoning goes, it can have no legitimate claim to the redress of its grievances.

Moral high ground goes to innocent victims. There is danger, however, in this structure of morality and victims. If a victimized group can be proven to lack innocence, the implication is that the group no longer deserves justice. Any hint of moral ambiguity, or the possession of power and agency, throws a shadow across one's moral spotlight. Maintaining one's status as victim becomes crucial for being acknowledged and given credibility. . . .

This tendency to identify with innocent victims, and to avoid discussions of the moral ambiguities of life, continues to place responsibility for abuse on the victims of the system. Abuse is wrong not because victims are innocent, but because abuse, even by good people for a good cause, dehumanizes the abuser and abused. Hence, we need to focus not on innocence, but on what is wrong with abusive behavior.²⁵

Communities that have suffered from years of colonial and racist violence cannot reasonably be expected to have remained unscarred by the experience. Ironically, we often feel that the only way to publicly confirm our status as victims of such violence is to deny vociferously the effects of our victimization. In doing so, however, we not only burden ourselves with an unfair (not to mention impossible) standard of prelapsarian innocence, but we also set ourselves up for failure: knowledge of our problems cannot remain within our communities; inevitably, our shortcomings will be known. Consequently, charges Brock, we must argue that our oppression should be addressed, regardless of the oppressive behavior or dysfunctionality that may exist within our communities.

That is, while liberation theologians claim to take the side of the oppressed, analysis within theological projects does not tend to center around those most marginalized *within* our communities—prisoners, teenage mothers, sex workers, drug users, the HIV positive, etc (although this trend may be shifting).²⁶ Rather, theologians often focus on those

25. Rita Nakashima Brock, "Ending Innocence and Nurturing Willfulness," *Violence Against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook*, eds. Carol Adams and Marie Fortune (New York: Continuum, 1995), 80–81.

26. For some exceptions, see Kelly Brown-Douglas's analysis of homophobia in the Black church which centers around those marginalized for their sexuality, including people with AIDS and single mothers Kelly Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1999); Kelly Brown Douglas, "Daring to Speak," *Embracing the Spirit*, ed. Emilie Townes (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997), 234–246. For other works that focus on people with AIDS, see Toinette Eugene, "How Can We Forget?," *Embracing the Spirit*, ed. Emilie Townes (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997), 247–274; Elias Farajaje-Jones, "Breaking Silence: Toward an In-The-Life Theology," *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, eds. James Cone and Gayraud

who provide a positive image for the community—writers, cultural workers, social activists, etc.²⁷ Victor Anderson contends that the tendency to theologize around those who are seen as more socially acceptable rather than around the non-persons within oppressed communities is part of what he calls the "the cult of black heroic genius."

I use the word cult here to designate dispositions of devotion, loyalty, and admiration for racial categories and the essentialized principles that determine black identity. And racial genius refers to the exceptional, sometimes essentialized cultural qualities that positively represent the racial group in the action of at least one of the group's members. Insofar as one member's actions are said to represent the genius of the group, that member also exhibits the heroic qualities of the race.²⁸

Turner sees the "cult of black heroic genius" as part of the project of "ontological blackness" which he claims marks most Black liberation and Womanist theologies. "It makes race identity a totality that subordinates and orders internal differences among blacks, so that gender, social standing, and sexual orientations are secondary to racial identity."²⁹

Wilmore, vol. 2 (1993), 139–159; Bill Smith, "Liberation as Risky Business," *Changing Conversations*, eds. Dwight Hopkins and Sheila Devaney (London: Routledge, 1996) 207–223. Works that discuss prostitution (although very briefly) include Aruna Gnanadasan, "Asian Theological Methodology," *Voices from the Third World* 18.1 (1995): 83–101; Hyun Kyung Chung, "Your Comfort vs. My Death," A Korean Woman's Reflection on Military Sexual Slavery by Japan," *Voices from the Third World* 18.1 (1995): 192–210; Mbuy-Beya, "Woman in the Mission of the Church," *Voices from the Third World* 20.2 (1997): 99–120.

27. For some works that focus on figures who provide a positive image for the community or the middle-class sectors of the community, see Karen Baker-Fletcher, *A Singing Something: Womanist Reflections on Anna Julia Cooper* (New York: Crossroads, 1994); James Cone, *Martin and Malcolm in America: A Dream or a Nightmare?* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991); Jeanette Rodriguez, "Sangre llama a sangre: Cultural Memory as a Source of Theological Insight," *Hispanic/Latino Theology*, eds. Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz and Fernando Segovia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1996), 117–133; Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, *Exorcizing Evil* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997); Marcia Riggs, *Awake, Arise and Act* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1994); Clarice Martin, "Biblical Theodicy and Black Women's Spiritual Autobiography," *A Troubling in My Soul*, ed. Emilie Townes (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993), 13–36; M. Shawn Copeland, "Wading Through Many Sorrows," *A Troubling in My Soul*, ed. Emilie Townes (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993), 109–129; Rosetta Ross, "Womanist Work and Public Policy," *Embracing the Spirit*, ed. Emilie Townes (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997), 41–53; Karen Baker-Fletcher, "The Strength of My Life," *Embracing the Spirit*, ed. Emilie Townes (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997), 122–139; Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, "A Conscious Connection to All That Is," *Embracing the Spirit*, ed. Emilie Townes (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997), 275–296.

28. Victor Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness* (New York: Continuum, 1999), 13.

29. Turner, 117. It should be said, however, that this critique of Black liberation/womanist theology seems a bit reductionist, and his call for a theology that is capable of "transcending the blackness that whiteness created" seems impossible (and not necessarily desirable) in the racist society we currently live (117).

Cathy Cohen further describes in her study of black responses to AIDS how groups which define themselves in opposition to the dominant public police create boundaries of what can be represented as part of that group. "Through the process of public policing, which communicates the judgments, evaluations, and condemnations of recognized leaders . . . the full membership of certain segments . . . is contested and challenged."³⁰ Thus, those individuals who rise to prominence in oppressed communities often relate to their constituents in a neo-colonial way, policing their communities in a manner which ultimately supports the current power structure.

This tendency is understandable: organizations and communities will tend to organize around individuals who are likely to garner large-scale public support. However, the result of this theological analysis and social activism is that we allow the powers-that-be to divide us. For instance, in the Black civil rights movement, Rosa Parks was not the first woman to sit in the back of the bus. Claudette Colvin had done so nine months before in Montgomery, but the NAACP decided not to champion her cause because she was a single, teen mother and they thought they couldn't get the community to organize around her.³¹ What would have happened had the community chosen to rally around her? The benefits of the strategy it employed almost go without saying, but it is important to not lose sight of what we lose with this strategy as well. In particular, we have adopted a politic in which racial equality has become premised on the demonization of poor people of color, particularly single mothers. As a variety of scholars have noted, the socio-economic conditions of Blacks in the inner city have declined rather than improved since the civil rights movement.³²

Beth Richie also warns us that our unwillingness to side with those in our communities who are least acceptable to the mainstream ultimately undermines our movements: our rejection of the most oppressed signifies the extent to which we ultimately hold ourselves accountable to the powerful, who will never accept us anyway, rather than to the powerless. Her analysis of the anti-violence movement applies to all movements for social justice:

30. Cathy Cohen, *The Boundaries of Blackness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 74.

31. David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), 15-16.

32. Loic J.D. Wacquant, "The New Urban Color Line: The State and Fate of the Ghetto in PostFordist America," *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Malden: Blackwell, 1994), 216-230; Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton, *American Apartheid* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

We must not deny the part of ourselves and the part of our work that is least acceptable to the mainstream public. Just because we're lesbian. Or maybe because a survivor is addicted and relapsing, or because she may be young and pregnant, again. Or because she's a sex worker or because she does not have legal status in this country. We must not let those who really object to all of us and our work, co-opt some of us and the work we're trying to do. As if this anti-violence movement could ever really be legitimate in a patriarchal, racist society. . . Ultimately, our movement needs to be accountable, not to those in power, but to the powerless.³³

Thus, for social justice movements and liberation theology to be truly liberatory they must critically assess the extent to which they recreate a Canaanite ideology in their practice.

Conclusion—Can The Bible Be Redeemed?

Warrior (and Deloria) pose important challenges to liberation theology. Can a Christian theology ever really liberate? Or are Christianity and the Bible hopelessly implicated in colonialism and genocide? Warrior paints a pessimistic picture of the liberatory potential of the Bible. While he argues that Christians of good will may try to re-interpret the Bible in more liberatory ways, "the text itself will never be altered by interpretations of it."³⁴

However, since Warrior's essay was originally published, biblical and religious scholars have increasingly engaged poststructuralist and postcolonial theory which challenges notions of textual determinacy that seem to undergird Warrior's analysis. Poststructuralism holds that there is no objective text that exists outside a community of interpretation. Hence the biblical text, like any text, is not fixed in its meaning. As Itumeleng Mosala argues, the bible and other forms of theological discourse are never fixed and always subject to contestation. "It is not enough to recognize text as ideology. Interpretations of texts do alter the texts. Contrary to Warrior's argument, "texts are signifying practices and, therefore, they exist ideologically and permanently problematically."³⁵

33. Incite! Women of Color Against Violence, ed. Beth Richie, *Plenary presentation* (University of California, Santa Cruz: Incite! Women of Color Against Violence, 2000), 32.

34. Robert Warrior, "Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians," *Natives and Christians*, ed. James Treat (New York: Routledge, 1996), 98.

35. Itumeleng Mosala, "Why Apartheid was Right about the Unliberated Bible," *Voices from the Third World* 17.1 (1994): 158.

Mosala's approach suggests that theological discourse is never simply liberatory or oppressive, but that oppressed groups can engage in it to wrest it away from paradigms set up dominating classes in order to further liberatory struggles.³⁶ Or, to quote African theologian Emmanuel Martey, "Unlike Audre Lorde, who might be wondering whether the master's tools could indeed be used to dismantle the master's house, African theologians are fully convinced that the gun, in efficient hands, could well kill its owner."³⁷ We cannot assume that indigenous peoples use the same reading strategies as do those of the dominant culture. As Dorinne Kondo notes, assimilation is always unfinished business. "Even when colonized peoples imitate the colonizer, the mimesis is never complete, for the specter of the 'not quite, not white' haunts the colonizer, a dis-ease that always contains an implicit threat to the colonizer's hegemony."³⁸ In other words, groups that seemingly attempt to replicate the dominant culture or religious practice, not only never fully do so, but the very act of mimesis challenges the hegemonic claims of colonizers. And on the other hand, oppositional practices are never free from reinscribing that which they contest. Thus, rather than simply arguing that Christianity is either redemptive or liberatory, we might be able to think about (1) what areas of resistance are possible in any site, and (2) how do all of these options for resistance continue to reinscribe colonial paradigms?

Warrior's analysis is still pertinent today, however. While texts may not be fixed in meaning, they are not free-floating signifiers either. They are imbricated in histories of which they cannot easily be disentangled. Thus, Warrior's and Deloria's cautions against liberation theologians presuming they can easily free themselves from the vestiges of the Christian empire are still relevant today.

36. Rita Nakashima Brock offers a similar analysis of the bible. "Since I am not an essentialist in my thinking, I do not believe the Bible is inherently patriarchal. It contains a multitude of voices. To identify it uniformly as hopelessly patriarchal gives too much credit to a few elite men" Rita Nakashima Brock, "Dusting the Bible on the Floor: A Hermeneutics of Wisdom," *Searching the Scripture*, ed. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroads, 1993), 71.

37. Emmanuel Martey, *African Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994), 46.

38. Dorinne Kondo, *About Face* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 10.

The (Im)moral Origins of White U.S.-American Identity: Native/African/English, Savage/Heathen/Christian

JENNIFER HARVEY

Rather than beginning my inquiry with abstract definitions or theoretical claims, I want to begin with three vignettes. These vignettes illuminate the framework through which I want to explore the problem of whiteness—what I am going to call "the moral crisis of 'being white'."

The first vignette is anecdotal. Recently, I have been serving as an anti-lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender violence prevention educator in the New York City Public Schools. After each workshop we ask the students to fill out an evaluation. The form includes a section called "Anonymous Participant Information: *How do you identify?*" It is followed by a list: "African American/African Descent, Caribbean/West Indian, Latina/o, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American, White, Multiracial, and Other (please specify)." It instructs the students that they may check as many as apply.¹

During the evaluation in a sixth-grade class two students encountered difficulty. A girl called me over. She pointed to the information section and asked, "What does this mean?" I responded, "How do you identify, as in what is your race? Or, what race do you identify with?" She looked at me confused and said, "you mean, well, like, I'm Italian?" Another student subsequently motioned for me. He too was confused: "What am I supposed to put?" he asked. "Well," I said, "how do you identify? What's your racial identity?" His face took on a look I read as

1. The form was designed by the Youth Enrichment Services (Y.E.S.) program of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center of New York.