

As global white privilege, racism poses a most dangerous threat to being, to the creation and development of human community, to the flourishing of the Spirit in human lives, to the realization of the body of Christ, to the reign of God. Now inasmuch as theology seeks to understand, to interpret, and to impart the word of God and its meanings in various historical, cultural, and social contexts, it grapples with the conditions and state of culture and society. Racism is one such biased condition in the world order. But, theology can meet its critical exigence only when theologians take up comprehensive analysis and reflection on society and its potential meaning for the realization of a common human good.

—*M. Shawn Copeland*¹

The waning years of the civil rights movement produced a flurry of theological activity among clergy and professors within the black Christian experience. That activity, to some extent, carried into the late-twentieth-century writings and sermons of these thinkers. One of the watershed moments that prompted the surge of ideas was Stokely Carmichael's "Black Power" proclamation. The rising sentiment among many young persons in the movement leaned toward ending black political and social gradualism. The June 1966 march in Greenwood, Mississippi, was a boiling point for the leaders of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). This group, among other black civil rights groups, had grown somewhat fatigued with the decision-making tree within the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Younger activists were finding their voice in the struggle for black freedom.

Footage of an interview that graces the scenes of the documentary *Citizen King* shows a debate that took place between Carmichael and Martin Luther King Jr. A journalist interviews both leaders as they march down a Mississippi highway. The journalist questions Carmichael and King on the use of Black Power rhetoric. Carmichael, a young upstart advocate of the term, discusses the merits of including "Black Power" in his civil rights stump speeches. The journalist then turns the microphone to King, the acknowledged leader and

veteran of the movement. King agrees with the principles of Black Power but frowns upon the language. The documentary fast-forwards to later in the evening. Police surround the masses of black people who attended the movement rally. The impending sound bites suggest that Carmichael rubbed off on King, if only somewhat. King mounts a stage to calm the crowd and calls for Black Power in their resistance. The black religious conversation was no different. As the long years of the civil rights movement elapsed, alternative notions of a black response to racism emerged. Black theopolitical talk did not take place in a vacuum. A dialogue began that forged lines of debate about the essential character and vocation of black public faith.

Black public faith ideas stem from a long tradition of black preachers, theologians, and ethicists discontented with the social order in America. This black public faith, born out of the African American religious experience of making sense of faith in the public sphere, challenged white supremacy at each turn. Dennis Dickerson argues that numerous black religious intellectuals in the twentieth century developed a theological witness that informed the civil rights movement. Benjamin Mays, Howard Thurman, and lesser-known black religious scholars constructed their ideas in black churches and white seminaries and graduate schools in the early to middle years of that century. Diversity, moreover, exists and existed in this universe of black Christian social engagement. Numerous theological approaches to navigating black life gained notoriety and/or waned into the post-segregation era. The common thread, however, was a singular focus (i.e., contesting racism) born out of a sense of vocation. Participants in the dialogue about black public faith consisted of the varied voices of black religious intellectuals—be they academics or pastoral leaders—committed to improving black life. They weighed into conversations about the nature and character of theology, the failings of white theology, and the theopolitical contributions of the biblical witness. They engaged racism within smaller and larger public spaces. These black theologians, preachers, and religious ethicists challenged “establishment theologies” and debated among themselves about the merits of their respective viewpoints. These representatives meet, in their own ways, M. Shawn Copeland’s requirements of the Christian theologian pressed by systemic racism. Copeland argues that the theologian should have a thorough grasp of (black) social and cultural circumstances, attempt to offer responses and challenges to questions that confront faith, and be critical, to interrogate the conditions of researched cultural and social findings.

With time, the post-segregation era produced notable theologians, preachers, and ethicists who took the mantle of black Christian theologies in

varied directions. They bore similar themes and notions of racial consciousness, but they also had nuanced positions and different emphases. James Cone's "black theology" had distinctive features that stood out from J. Deotis Roberts's understanding of black theology and its "soul" content. Katie Cannon, Delores Williams, emilie townes, and others in the womanist tradition distinguished themselves quickly from a yet-to-be-defined black religious feminist tradition. To be sure, matters of gender made black theology as articulated by its prominent spokespersons a less-than-viable stand-alone option for many black women Christian thinkers. Some black clergypersons found a home within conservative movements. Few were more visible and vocal than E. V. Hill (1933–2003). His alliances with Billy Graham and Jerry Falwell and his political affiliation with the Moral Majority made him suspect in some black Christian circles. Hill endorsed and campaigned for mostly Republican presidential candidates from the late 1960s forward. Jesse Jackson seems to fall on the other end of the religious-political spectrum. Jackson, Baptist preacher and former presidential candidate, has been avowedly "left" in many social matters. There may not be a more public and political figure than Jackson in recent black religious life except Al Sharpton (Rev. Al of MSNBC).

Although emerging and influential black Christian voices in the post-segregation era flooded seminaries, churches, and television screens, Samuel DeWitt Proctor remained true to the generation that birthed him. He was a "race man" who embraced the social consciousness of the black theological leaders of his time and held fast to the "liberation theology" of his black social gospel rearing. Proctor's vocation and witness provided him the space to measure the changes in society and black public faith. He discerned that his voice was the balance between conservative and liberal strands of black Christian public faith. Proctor's black social gospel theology vied for the universality of the human experience exemplified in the life and teachings of Jesus. Though Proctor differed with some of the ideas that made their way into black Christian thought, he found some common ground on the matter of the vocation of black public faith.

RACISM AND THE VOCATION OF BLACK PUBLIC FAITH

At the core of the post-segregation black public faith tradition(s) was a sense of call. The essence of that vocation was the desire to fight racism and the many vestiges of white privilege in American society. This call inspired the voices of black Christian preachers, theologians, and ethicists to address racism with the equipment and language of their time. At the foundation of their notions of black public faith was their belief in the inherent dignity of the human

being as a God-given birthright. Their paths to affirming black humanity, however, differed. I note that ideological shifts and transitions take place from one generation to the next. I also acknowledge that caution is necessary when presupposing clear lines of distinction between the generations. (Generational gaps often seem to explain some differences in the ways that persons react and/or respond to one another in dialogue and/or debate.) For example, one can trace Samuel DeWitt Proctor's influences to persons such as W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. Du Bois and Washington reinforced some of the terms of the debate about racial uplift. James H. Cone admits to embracing the thought of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. Katie Cannon and others claim the work their souls must have as bequeathed to them from black "foremothers" such as Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Zora Neale Hurston, and Nannie Helen Burroughs. These are only a few examples that suggest both a contrast and parallel course within the black public faith traditions. But they all sensed and responded to a call to fight racism.

The point of this chapter is to examine some of the key contributions of representative leaders in the black public faith tradition. The following survey is an attempt to distinguish Proctor from the "right" and "left" of black public faith talk. Several visible black leaders in the church, parachurch organizations, and the academy offered theological contributions to that singular vocation. The functions of their thought and presence in their respective locations fall in line with what Robert Gooding-Williams identifies as the genre-defining thematic preoccupations of the Afro-modern political tradition: (1) the political and social organization of white supremacy; (2) the nature and effects of racial ideology; and, (3) the possibilities of black emancipation. In their own way, the ethicists, theologians, and preachers described in this chapter were and are more or less preoccupied with these matters. But they do not all agree on the paths to black social and spiritual emancipation.² Their vocation, however, is their common ground.

As a type of theopolitical thinker, Proctor assessed the public faith concepts of black Christian thinkers on the right and on the left and found them inadequate. Proctor believed they did little to prepare people for the inevitability of the kingdom of God and genuine community. That is, he desired a moral-spiritual ideal that affirmed all personhood as displayed and taught by Jesus. Proctor continued to see himself as a bridge figure—a pragmatic harmonizer—who represented the values and beliefs that shaped the civil rights struggles. He carried the banner of the black social gospel tradition into the post-segregation era. He was a part of the black religious intellectual vanguard that carried Du Bois's notions of leadership into mainstream black church

pulpits and seminaries. A pulpit that featured the best and the brightest was his ideal. But the social and theological gradualism of Proctor's generation frustrated some of the younger black theologians and ministers. Proctor argued for his theological contribution as a more pragmatic choice in the evolving post-Jim Crow world of black public faith. As the gendered and racialized theological offerings of a late-twentieth-century budding black religious intellectual cadre arose, Proctor found solace in the methodical public faith expressions that brought about the gains that the current generation inherited. Far from content with the social arrangements in the United States, Proctor believed in the founding principles of the nation and the moral power of the Christian social gospel. Others expressed different concerns and beliefs about the conditions in American life.

THE DISCOURSE OF A BLACK THEOLOGICAL REVOLUTION

James H. Cone's monumental work *Black Theology and Black Power* helped in solidifying an alternative conversation in the African American Christian experience. Cone was completing his graduate studies while the civil rights movement waned, and his concern was for a public faith that celebrated being black and Christian. Persons such as Martin Luther King Jr., Stokely Carmichael, and Malcolm X influenced Cone's thought. Cone also found himself conversing with members of the National Committee of Negro Churchmen, a group that phrased a racially sensitive commitment to the Christian faith. This group took seriously the language and principles of the Black Power movement. In 1966, these pastors and theological educators expressed their sentiments in a *New York Times* statement on Black Power. Cone did his own wrestling with the sensitive questions of race and faith. The result was a theology that celebrated and affirmed the inherent worth of blackness. It privileged black existence by identifying it with the historical life and work of Jesus. As a part of a larger theological shift during the post-segregation era, Cone's black theology responded to African American critics of Christianity through highlighting the authentic contributions of the black experience. Cone's black theology gave black clergy, primarily seminary-educated black clergy, a mode of discourse through which "black" and "Christian" could make sense to a generation of black people who were witnessing the birth of a changing nation. James H. Cone, among others within the Black Power tradition, identified within theology the goal of self-realization and political autonomy that stemmed from a heightened understanding of black consciousness. For Cone, this self-realization evolved within the black experience of oppression in an inherently corrupt political and social order. This

experience paralleled that of the historical Jesus, Cone argues, and his suffering with a downtrodden people.

Cone found himself influenced by the diverse voices of racial uplift that emerged from the civil rights movement. For Cone, Martin Luther King Jr. made theology Christian. Malcolm X, Cone notes, helped make theology black. Both perspectives appealed to Cone. This dialectic aided Cone in hearing the changing tenor of black Christian faith. Carmichael and the emerging nationalist voices within the civil rights struggle provided some cultural space for Cone to retain his Christian beliefs with revisions. Cone writes, “Blackness gave me new theological spectacles, which enabled me to move beyond the limits of white theology and empowered my mind to think wild, heretical thoughts when evaluated by white academic values. . . . Blackness whetted my appetite for learning how to do theology with a black signature on it and thereby make it accountable to poor black people and not to the privileged white theological establishment.”³ Cone experienced the turbulence of the 1950s and ’60s and grew up with racism in the state of Arkansas. What Cone later came to label “Black Theology” was a counter to the apparent self-effacing theology within mainstream black Christianity. Black Power, then, was a necessary correlate between African Americans and the power of the Christian faith.

Cone’s early work on black theology sought to give the notion of Black Power legitimacy within religious dialogue. In his text *Black Theology and Black Power*, he defined Black Power as the “complete emancipation of black people from white oppression by whatever means black people deem necessary.”⁴ With freedom as its primary objective, Cone intended that Black Power be a liberating force for black existence. As Cone and others saw it, Black Power ignites the type of self-determination that allows African Americans to free themselves from oppression. Black Power also informs a notion of black humanity that celebrates black being. Cone contends that it is a humanizing force in that it affirms that being, lifts it up as good. He writes, “Black Power, in short, is an *attitude*, an inward affirmation of the essential worth of blackness.”⁵ Affirming blackness is the path to freedom, Cone maintains. Moving from oppression to freedom means defining for oneself what black means, and affirming it. That is an essential step in the process. What white persons degrade and devalue—blackness—is the essence of black persons’ freedom. Without pride in blackness, African Americans are prone to continued power disparity and de facto social-political disfranchisement. Matters such as integration, therefore, required qualifications that Cone sought to address.

Cone did not set out to justify racial separation with his theological construct. The tone in which he wrote his earlier works reflected the anger of many black people in 1960s and '70s America. But one should not confuse the tone with the aim of his public faith. In *Black Theology and Black Power*, Cone states that God did not make humanity to be separate. Cone argues that persons ought not to live with color defining their humanity. But the reality of racism in America beckoned for a corrective. Such was the case, then, that integration needed a clear definition for Cone. If integration meant that blacks would accept the “style” and values of whites to gain entrance into the American mainstream, Cone wanted a new definition. He was suspicious of “white religion.” Cone suggests that the “white man” has nothing that blacks should compromise to get. Cone offers, however, a way in which he envisioned integration taking place. Black and white people come together on “equal footing,” with no one laying claims to rightness in matters of style and values. This meeting could produce a dialogue that reflects what Cone refers to as the kingdom of God. Seeing that as unrealistic, Cone dismisses integration to reassert the need for pride in blackness: “What is needed, then, is not ‘integration’ but a sense of worth in being black, and only black people can teach that. Black consciousness is the key to the black man’s emancipation from his distorted self-image.”⁶

The challenge for Cone, as Peter Paris notes, was to justify Black Power’s use in African American faith formation. As Cone saw it, a faith that could translate in the ghetto was the only one necessary for the times in which he wrote. Cone grabbed hold of the revolutionary energy of Black Power proponents and channeled it into an interpretive principle for Christian faith. But this energy found few supporters from the generation of black preachers and theologians who preceded Cone. Proctor was one of those persons who failed to see black theology’s enduring worth for public faith. He would maintain that a lasting corrective for theology must come through its ethical contribution. Attaching race to theology, therefore, is a transient fix. But Cone was not the only notable theologian who produced literature that captured that revolutionary tone. “Black theology” perspectives differed, calling for varied emphases that celebrated blackness for Christian faith talk.

A SOUL THEOLOGY OF SYMBOLISM AND PLURALISM

J. Deotis Roberts entered the black public faith conversation in the post-civil-rights era with what Dwight Hopkins calls a black theology of balance. Roberts received the majority of his theological education in England but concerned himself with the black struggle in America. This led Roberts to produce several

works that focused on the political nature of black theology. He writes, “What I am seeking is a Christian theological approach to race relations that will lead us beyond a hypocritical tokenism to liberation as a genuine reconciliation between equals.”⁷ For Roberts, the country was inconsistent in adhering to the democratic values it stressed. He celebrated Cone and other black theologians’ efforts to make theology meaningful for black Americans. Roberts saw black theology as a necessary public faith that could instill the cultural symbols, religious values, and reconciling faith that would affirm black existence. He believed that this soul theology has its place in a white racist society. It balanced what he saw as the need to boost black self-esteem with the symbolism of blackness while aiming for a pluralistic American society.

Roberts’s approach to black theology emphasizes the particularity of race. This is a fundamental point of departure for his construct. “Black consciousness or awareness is a realistic foundation for our theological task,” he writes. He continues by stating, “When blacks move from color blindness to color consciousness, it becomes difficult to avoid the implications of Black Power.” But blackness in America, Roberts argues, is a difficult cultural phenomenon. The “spatial distance” and passage of time between life in Africa and life in America sever much of black people’s connection to Africa. And a black person’s citizenship in America is contingent upon white temperament and progressive legislation. Roberts, therefore, calls black people a “marginal” people. African Americans are neither fully African nor fully American.⁸ A theology of the black experience, therefore, has a unique perspective to offer.

An important part of connecting the Christian faith to the black experience, Roberts argues, is symbol. Lauding Albert Cleage’s *The Black Messiah*, Roberts calls for a black savior who appeals to black people. He claims that an Americanized Christ is foreign to the experience of black people. A black Christ, however, is a visual that engenders pride. Roberts notes, “The black person has in the black Messiah a savior. He or she discovers his or her own dignity and pride in a self-awareness that is rooted in black consciousness.”

⁹ Roberts did not claim that the historical Christ was black, but the symbolism of a black Christ sends an important message: black people matter. By no means does Roberts intend for a black Christ to be reverse racism. Roberts sees black theology, through liberation and reconciliation, as a means to reach interracial harmony. The symbol that is the black Christ is a marker for something deeper. A black Christ is a point of entry and departure for the African American. A black Christ is particular inasmuch as a black Christ represents the particularity of the black experience. That Christ is a liberator whose existence frees black people. But Roberts distinguishes the symbolism of a black Christ from the

universal functions of the Christ of the gospel. The universal Christ meets people where they are: “A universal Christ will be as ‘existential’ to red, yellow, and black people as he is to white people,” says Roberts. A symbolic Christ becomes the black Messiah for black people. That Christ understands the particulars of the black experience and circumstances that shape black faith.

Roberts maintains that struggles of black people in America create a hermeneutic that will allow black people to be authentically Christian. In his work *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology*, he states that white Christians are “guilty of malpractice.”¹⁰ In this way, white Christians have lived an inauthentic existence. Blacks who have followed the Christianity of whites have also failed to be genuine. Theology from the black experience, for black people, remedies this existence. Black theology positions black people to liberate the race. Liberation and reconciliation, Roberts contends, are two central aspects of black theology. The presence of both displays a reality in which blacks and whites relate to each other as equals. This is Roberts’s ideal relationship between blacks and whites in America.

With liberation and reconciliation at the core of his theology, Roberts does not desire racial separation. Nowhere is this belief more evident than in his understanding of Jesus as Christ. Roberts writes, “Reconciliation is a more excellent way. Christ the Liberator is likewise Christ the Reconciler. God was in Christ setting us free and God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. . . . Reconciliation has to do with overcoming estrangement, mending fences, breaking down walls of separation between men.”¹¹ Liberation and reconciliation are divine functions of Christ. One does not work without the other, for Roberts. The lack of these theological factors explains the problem with integration in America. On one hand, he suggests, whites have not known the power of reconciliation through repentance. On the other hand, blacks have not realized the power of liberation. African Americans have not known the right conditions to live into the “inner freedom” that is necessary to challenge white hegemonic structures and privilege. This makes integration no more than a sham. The absence of equity and the affirmation of human dignity represent the failures of integration.

Roberts describes human dignity as a divine right and integral to God’s desired order for humanity. Roberts writes, “All men are one in the creative purpose—we are made in the image of God. This is the basis of human dignity and equality.”¹² Proctor would agree with this assessment. He would question, however, whether Roberts provides a comprehensive public theology. For Proctor, the point of departure (a black theology) represents a compromise of the kingdom of God. White Christian churches and leaders had already made

that mistake. For Roberts and others, Black Power and black theology wrest the message of human equality and divine dignity from the hands of racists and white liberal hypocrites. Black theology clarifies this idea and makes it real. Black theology speaks to the black experience, because it was born in the black experience. In black theology, Roberts recognizes a public faith that witnesses to its cultural particularities; it celebrates the dignity of blackness with no apology. Roberts contends, “Soul sums up the black experience, whether religious or secular, better than any other term. . . . Soul theology is Black Theology.”¹³

BLACK WOMEN AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF COMMUNITY

Closely related to black theology is the womanist tradition. The towering pioneers of womanist thought challenged the dominant categories of theology, ethics, and biblical studies with their writings and presence in the academy. Their advocacy for a theological prism that privileges the experience of black women was a necessary corrective within the emerging post-segregation cacophony of black Christian ideas. Contesting the neglect of their experience within the black and feminist theological traditions, womanist theology and ethics became political and cultural combatants in the public conversation about black life and faith. Womanist thought, through Katie Cannon, Delores Williams, Jacquelyn Grant, emilie townes, and others, created a forum for contesting the racism and sexism that black women face in the United States. These religious intellectuals interpreted the history, experiences, and writings of black women to liberate and empower black women. Intuitively embracing the definition of “womanist” by Alice Walker, they constructed new ways of understanding humanity, community. While interrogating the accepted concepts of white male “universal” theology, womanist thought reframed the issues of race and gender in ways that black and feminist theologians failed to consider. In each of these theological systems, the particularities of race, class, and gender privilege the experiences of their respective authors. Womanist theologians rightly argued for constructs that take seriously the experience of black women. As Stephanie Mitchem argues, “Womanist theology, then, critically draws from the many meanings of faith in the lives of black women in order to assess doctrinal and ecclesial constructions and to begin reconstructions that have relevance, meaning, and power in their lives.”¹⁴ To be sure, Katie Geneva Cannon, Delores Williams, and other black womanist theologians and ethicists reconstructed theology and ethics (created a black public faith) with black women at the foundation of their work to push the academy and church toward genuine community.

Katie G. Cannon's explanations of the importance and vocation of the womanist theologian offer insight about this reconstructive process. She set out to challenge the bias that exists in scholarship and in liturgy. Her notable experiences include being the first black woman to earn a doctorate from the Union Theological Seminary in New York and the first black woman to be ordained in the Presbyterian Church in the USA. Positioned to see "life on the inside" of hegemonic structures, she offers this critique: "The accepted canonical methods of moral reasoning contain deeply hidden biases that make it exceedingly difficult to turn them to the service of the best interest of Black women. Universality does not include the Black female experience."¹⁵ The universal that Cannon refers to is the centuries-old constructions of theology and ethics by white male theologians. Biases in theological frameworks are also present in the concepts and ideologies of black and feminist theologies. Their efforts at racial and gender "catchall" theologies lack the complex experiences of black women. Womanist scholarship, then, "moves us toward a fundamental reconceptualization of all ethics with the experience of black women at center stage." Cannon contends that the womanist scholar describes, documents, and analyzes the ideologies and systems that oppress black women. Among these ideologies and systems are gender, class, and race. In turn, the womanist scholar uses the product of this analysis to enhance and support structures of knowledge from which black women can liberate themselves and others.

Cannon's book *Black Womanist Ethics* is a prime example of this reconstructive task. She identified the black woman's literary tradition as a rich source for theological ethics. The folk traditions of black people, she argues, carry rich mother wit and wisdom for everyday living. This tradition is the best "literary repository" of the ethical values of black women, Cannon maintains. In Cannon's view, the need for a turn to this source is obvious: "Seldom in history has a group of women been so directly responsible for exerting indispensable efforts to insure the well-being of both the Black family and the white. At the same time the Black woman is placed in such a sharp disadvantaged position as to accept obligingly the recording of her own story by the very ones who systematically leave her out."¹⁶ After chronicling the moral circumstances of the black woman's life in the United States, she focuses her study on Zora Neale Hurston. Black women writers such as Hurston mine the values and commitments of the black community to frame a narrative that the other races and gender miss. For Cannon, black women writers capture sights and sounds, joys and pains that other groups neglect in analysis. She does not, however, exclude the voices of black men in her constructive work. She ends her text by examining the notion of community as defined by Howard Thurman and

Martin Luther King Jr. She lifts up their ideas as some of the best thinking on the subject within the black church tradition.

Womanist scholars do not seek to exclude persons, especially black men, from their public faith conversation. As emilie townes notes, “Rather than assume the universal claims of traditional theologies, womanist theology acknowledges that all theological reflection is limited by human cultural, social, and historical contexts. These limits are not negative, but merely representative of our humanity. Rather than restrict, these limits can serve as a challenge to explore the particular ways in which any group having similar characteristics (e.g., age, denomination, ethnicity, sexuality) experiences divine activity in life.”¹⁷ Delores Williams addresses a similar concern. She sees in womanist theology the mission to build community. And black men are an important part of that goal. Williams states that Walker defines womanist in a way that affirms “black women’s historic connection with men through love and through a shared struggle for survival and for productive quality of life (e.g., ‘wholeness’).”¹⁸ Williams concedes that only one obstacle to sharing community building exists: the violation of women’s health.

As an emerging tradition within the post-segregation era of African American public faith, womanist theologians and ethicists have challenged the normative boundaries of theology within the black experience. Their insights have called upon black men in church and academy to take seriously the perspectives of black women as authorities in the shaping of black community. In theory, Proctor understood the necessity of womanist and feminist ideas. He embraced much of the historical-critical models upon which womanist thinkers do their work. In a reaction that resembled his response to black theology, however, Proctor could not see a womanist theology as a viable option for sustaining genuine community. As a “hyphenated” theology, it remained a reflection of the divisive spirit within Christianity. But womanists’ collective contribution to black public faith comes in the form of a multilayered social-ethical analysis and methodology. Their work broadens the dialogue in theology along racial and gender lines within church and academy. Their scholarship provides a sounding board for keeping “dominant” groups honest in conversation and/or for calling out political and social structures for their racist and sexist current and past practices.

BLACK EVANGELICALISM IN CONSERVATIVE APPAREL

Post-segregation-era black public faith formed within pockets of the more “liberal” seminaries and among conservative black evangelical settings and preachers. Edward V. (E. V.) Hill is one example of this conservative faith

tradition. Hill was born into extreme economic poverty in rural Texas, and a loving couple, Aaron and Ella Langdon, took him in after receiving permission from his birth mother. In the home of these wonderful people, Hill found faith in Christ. He would speak of this experience with great joy and fervor throughout his career. His preaching ministry started on the college campus of Prairie View A&M University, where he became a ministerial associate for a Baptist convention's campus ministry. He went on to serve as pastor of the Corinth Baptist Church in Houston, Texas. The struggling congregation found a young and spirited leader in Hill. His ministry was instrumental in developing a vibrant congregation that increased in membership. During this time, Hill also joined with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to fight racism. He even boasted of how he helped elect Martin Luther King Jr. to the presidency of the SCLC. Hill was also proud of his courageous activism, often reflecting on the threats he received from the Ku Klux Klan during those civil rights struggles. The liberal social gospel Christianity of the SCLC would not remain a part of Hill's social-political philosophy, however. He constructed and/or inherited a conservative evangelical focus that promoted a gospel of soul salvation and self-help as the solution to the world's ills. He negotiated this view through a thriving local church social service ministry and leadership within local government. This approach was neither a political compromise nor a surrender to the victors; Hill found in Jesus what he believed was the appropriate response for the racial crisis.

A change of geographical and political scenery came when Hill took over the pastorate of the Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Los Angeles. Hill, who had received the nickname "Hellraiser" for his civil rights work in Houston, claimed that he had left that and his liberal-Democrat tendencies in Texas. Embracing the label of "conservative Republican," he accepted the call to Mt. Zion in 1961. There he found a struggling congregation and a community in political and social turmoil. Believing that there was a simpler way to uplift African Americans from the social problems they faced, Hill turned to a simpler message: save the soul. He argued that people sought salvation in the wrong places, and government was one of those places. Instead, the soul needs a savior who can respond to any need it might have. In this way, Hill gave voice to the disillusionment many black preachers had with the civil rights struggles and strategies. He no longer desired to create the social strategies that would win over society. He believed that Christ had already accomplished that. Hill's job, then, was to ensure that all persons hear the message "Jesus is Lord!"

Hill's alliances with conservative Christian forces did not necessarily mark a distinct shift in theological orientation. Finding allies in Jerry Falwell and

Billy Graham, among others, may have suggested more of a political shift than a theological one. Growing up in a southern rural Black Church experience, Hill heard and preached sermons that emphasized salvation. This was not much different from most evangelicals and fundamentalists. He also had known the oppressive life that racism created in Texas and had come to “hate” white people. He revealed this in a story he shares about a young woman who met with him after a revival.¹⁹ The young woman came at her sister’s request. She was becoming bitter with the world and trying to find answers to its problems. One of her questions to Hill was about the effectiveness of Christ on social matters such as racism. Could God deliver her from the burden that was the white man? Hill’s response reflected both the fuel behind his previous militant activism and his reoriented position. Hill stated, “No one hated white people more than I did until I was a freshman in college.” In an interview with Russell Chandler, Hill credited a part of that transformation to a Baptist Student Union retreat.²⁰ The state convention’s director for the students, Dr. W. F. Howard, drove Hill and some white students from Texas A&M University to the retreat. It was there that Hill saw “regenerated” white people who expressed what God was able to do in the lives of all people.²¹ That experience was a part of the “miraculous birth in Christ” that transformed Hill’s racial views. As Chandler notes, “Except for the grace of God, Hill might have turned out to be an angry black militant.”

Hill was a biblical literalist. It was this understanding of Christianity that helped connect him to Falwell and others in the Religious Right. Hill embraced a premillennial dispensationalism. In his book *A Savior Worth Having*, he argued for the existence of a literal hell. He used the following chapter to state the reasons he did not want to go to it. He stated that this “church age” (one of the markers of a dispensational view of history) has the confusing trait of God’s mercy “just being poured out” upon sinners and saints alike. Hill was far “to the right” of most of the other theologians listed in this chapter. But his conservative reading of the Bible was a familiar aspect of black church life in America.

The evangelical tendency in Hill’s thought focused on the reality of an afterlife as its end. This focus led Hill to produce *A Savior Worth Having* at the request of Moody Press. The text reflects the evangelical emphasis on the heavenward results of salvation. In his chapter “I Don’t Want to Go to Hell,” Hill is adamant about the reasons for his perspective. He relies upon an evangelism-tract-like statement of his case. First, hell is a real place. This, he writes, was an early lesson from his mother and an old preacher. Hell is real, and so is the invitation to go to heaven. Hell did not invite anyone, but Christ invited all to heaven. Second, the love of God does not find its way

into hell. Third, there is no relief in hell. The discomfort in this world, Hill explained, pales in comparison to what hell will present. Fourth, hell does not have exits. No one will escape from hell. Hill tells a story to support this idea. He mentions the fervent preaching of Dr. Jack Hyles from Hammond, Indiana. Hill stated that Hyles preached as if his life depended on it. Hyles, Hill wrote, told him that his sister had a dream in which she went to hell and witnessed its “desolation.” The story is similar to the biblical story of Lazarus and Dives (Luke 16:19-31). Hyles’s sister asked one of hell’s attendants how long its inhabitants would suffer. He told her, “Forever and ever!” She turned to leave and looked back to see that their father was in hell, suffering with all of hell’s residents. Hyles affirmed that their father was in hell and regretted that their father had not chosen Christ. Hyles concluded the story by telling Hill, “I win souls every day so that nobody else’s daddy has to go to hell.”²²

Hill’s public faith, far from being otherworldly in practice, was influenced by a disdain for black militancy and African Americans’ overreliance upon government. His life experiences vouched for an understanding of blackness that highlights the role of community in racial uplift. Knowing the power of a tight-knit black community that seeks the welfare of all its members, Hill did not understand the point of Black Power advocates. In an interview with Russell Chandler for the book *Overcomers*, Hill discussed his frustration with what he called “blackism.” Hill described blackism as an “almost idolatrous” focus on skin color that sought to get rights by “any means necessary.” Blackism also attempted to replace existing powers with Black Power, substituting corrupt white power with a vengeful and unjust power. For Hill, Black Power was a kind of reverse racism. He even suggested that “blackism” was the product of the maladjustment of African Americans to the progress that society had made on the racial front.²³ In the Watts section of Los Angeles, Hill’s approach to race relations only led to suspicion among many young African Americans. Some even threatened Hill’s life. Such was Hill’s belief in a color-neutral approach to race in America. Poverty and sin were better indicators of the American crisis for Hill.

Hill believed that the government had overreached on many promises to assist the black community. In an interview with Mark Joseph, Hill labeled some government assistance programs “Operation Frustration.”²⁴ Hill argued that, in at least two instances, the government had promised money that the people never saw in communities such as Watts. Once African Americans realized that the government would neglect them, the frustration built up to a boiling point. This is a part of how Hill explained both Watts riots. In this way, he would disagree with Proctor. Proctor cited the lack of moral support

from many persons within white evangelical circles as a part of the problem with the failures of the Great Society programs and similar social programs. Hill by that time began to align himself with those evangelical ministers in the Christian Right. He rode those conservative ties to a position of respect within the Republican Party. Hill called it the “Party of Prayer.” At the same time, Hill and his church funneled federal money into their community programming. Darren Dochuck writes, “By earning the trust of government officials, Hill gained access to power and money, which he channeled toward social initiatives he thought more effective than federal programs.”²⁵ Some of that money came from the Office of Economic Opportunity (Proctor’s employer at one point).²⁶ Dochuck’s description of Hill’s work with Los Angeles mayor Samuel Yorty and the social and evangelistic training program that Hill led through Mt. Zion clarify this practice. The program, an intense self-help training endeavor, included Bible study and job training. The work was interracial, seeking to uplift the people in Hill’s community. At the height of Hill’s ministry, the church offered a halfway house, the Lord’s Kitchen feeding ministry, a clothing ministry, and senior citizen centers.

E. V. Hill provides a stark contrast with others in this study, as he identified with conservative political forces within American Christianity. His staunch evangelicalism touted the salvation of the lost soul as its aim. Yet his theological beliefs provided space for political participation and outreach within his community and on a national level. His Los Angeles congregation maintained charitable and social service ministries among the people in the community. In his own way, Hill attempted to fight for the race. He knew well the struggles of black people. He also understood the cultural differences between his role as a black clergyperson and that of his white colleagues. Speaking to his congregants, he distinguished his duties from white clergy by suggesting that white pastors have fewer responsibilities. They merely marry, bury the dead, baptize, and preach. Their boards take care of other matters. The black pastor, he stated, “is considered a community leader, and every aspect of politics, education, civil rights, feeding people, fighting battles, organizing economic opportunities for black people, housing—all of that is considered part of being a good [black] pastor.”²⁷ Hill’s alliances and theological commitments, however, would make him a dubious character to most of the theologians in this chapter. Proctor worked on speeches for the Hubert Humphrey campaign. Hill ended up preaching at services in the Nixon White House, the administration of Humphrey’s opponent. Hill’s political commitments in the 1984 presidential campaign suggest an apparent tension between him and Jesse Jackson. Hill was an avowed Republican from California. He supported Ronald Reagan. Jesse

Jackson was a Democratic candidate for the presidency that year. Hill was a member of the National Baptist Convention, and Jackson had become the head of its civil rights arm under T. J. Jemison, the convention president. Hill was more favored in the convention during Joseph H. Jackson's tenure as president of the convention, Jemison's predecessor. J. H. Jackson also was a Republican.²⁸

Hill believed in fighting for a pluralistic world in which African Americans were equals. But he shunned heavy involvement from government and the rhetoric of Black Power, though he used federal money for his church ministries and had a background as a type of race rebel. He rejected any formal theological ideas that complicated a "just Jesus" formula for salvation. A black social gospel was too liberal, and black theology too radical. Hill preferred a Christ of faith, not a historical Jesus. That Christ of faith and the faith in him needed neither a color nor a gender. A gendered theology that elevates black women's narratives and experiences would probably be superfluous to Hill. Preaching the gospel of Christ for salvation meant access to heaven and escape from hell.²⁹

BLACK POLITICAL EVANGELISM AND THE RAINBOW THEOLOGY

Jesse Jackson may be the most complex person to identify within the post-segregation era of the African American public faith tradition. There is little evidence that suggests he concerned himself with theological treatises. But evidence does exist that displays his concern for connecting faith with the social circumstances of our time. He preaches a gospel of black economic uplift. He affirms black humanity with his slogan "I am somebody!" And he created multiracial and ethnic coalitions of people through his work with Operation PUSH (People United to Serve Humanity) and the Rainbow Coalition. He is also the product of the evangelical black Protestant stream of Christianity that Martin Luther King Jr. and other black social gospel theologians influenced. Black Power ideas, moreover, found their way into Jackson's beliefs. He maintains a cordial relationship with several social-theological traditions. He has made use of multiple sources to construct his public faith. In the Reverend Jesse Jackson, varied ideas of black public faith find their way into his political evangelistic sermons. His seemingly authentic use of these ideas and beliefs made for a "Rainbow Theology." Nowhere is this more evident than in the scores of black people he brought into the political process during his 1984 presidential run. As James Melvin Washington argues, Jackson's charismatic presence and political rhetoric made him one of the most influential black men in America since Booker T. Washington.³⁰ Jackson cultivated a political-religious ethos that spoke to the cultural affinities of black publics. Jackson's star

has faded some since the early post-civil-rights years. But his contribution to black public faith in America remains a force that requires further study.

Jesse Jackson's rise to public prominence came through his emerging charismatic leadership within the civil rights struggle and through his command of the perceived post-segregation vacuum of visible authority and organization. Jackson's biography reveals his contact with notable black public leaders during his vocational development. Jackson was a student at North Carolina A&T State University during Proctor's time as president of the institution. Jackson was student body president and had access to the president's ear. Proctor had some influence in Jackson's life. He had a hand in getting Jackson to enter seminary upon completing his undergraduate studies. Proctor cautioned Jackson by stating that Martin Luther King Jr. needed prepared leaders to work with him. This advice led to a brief stint at Chicago Theological Seminary for Jackson. Already a Baptist preacher, Jackson admitted that he was frustrated with all of the seminary theology talk that had no grounding in the real world. He withdrew from seminary and signed on full-time with the SCLC. The established civil rights organization found room for this gifted and socially conscious minister. Jackson quickly found favor among the leaders of the organization. King assigned Jackson leadership of the northern effort through Operation Breadbasket.

The SCLC declined in the years following King's death, but Jackson's public profile grew. He would take control of Operation Breadbasket and use it to begin his own organization, Operation PUSH. With this political organization in place, Jackson had the autonomy to establish his political agenda. The agenda would take him across the world in numerous political and religious capacities. Newspaper clippings, television broadcasts, books, and articles all testify about the extent of Jackson's visibility—or fame. Absent from most of these accounts is his theological legacy.

Jackson's rhetoric of black economic and social uplift grew out of the influence of Black Power rhetoric and action. Jackson's public faith absorbed some of this content. For example, he speaks of God in the language of power during the early post-segregation period. Jackson claims that God is creator and ruler of the moral order. God is the power that humanity appeals to for the good in life. In doing so, humanity acknowledges that there is no power above God. In a 1970 speech, "Christianity, the Church, and Racism," Jackson offers these words: "We relate to God and bow to him because he's power. If God didn't have power, we would disregard him. It is precisely because God is the maker and the giver of every good and perfect gift and the Creator and the sustainer, the one who made the valleys and made the mountains and

made all of the resources and who controls them and who can apply justice and who can grant mercy or grant grace Our basic relationship to God is a power relationship.”³¹ For Jackson, there would be no worship of God if not for God’s power to create and control creation. Jackson admits that the church has power and that it wants more power to wield its influence. What separates the church from “ordinary people” is its attempt to apply its power justly, by seeking a fair distribution of resources and wielding moral authority. Jackson stops short of giving God a race/color. He argues that God is an experience and a revelation. One relates to God, and God reveals God’s desire for love and justice. It is only fair, then, that African Americans be able to demand reparations, or compensation for years of unpaid labor. Neglect of such ideas by the leaders in the Christian church led Jackson to be critical of seminaries. He accuses them of using phrases “to death” without action that reflects the gospel.³² Seminaries (white), he contends, will not use black banks or invest in black communities. The white supremacy in the country, economic disparities among the races, and theological inconsistencies of the white power structures led Jackson to embrace Black Power themes.

Jesse Jackson has blamed the church for its lack of a prophetic voice during the early post-segregation-era events. He identifies a portion of the confusion that exists in much of American Christianity in the poorly crafted merger of nationalism and the Christian religion. Some persons combine notions of hyperpatriotism with a misguided Christianity, Jackson maintains. This troubled him during the Vietnam War period. He was concerned that so many young men volunteered to join the war effort. That, Jackson argues, was a moral-spiritual failure of clergy. Clergypersons, Jackson claims, need to make clear to American Christians the problems within the American social and political structures. Economically, a privileged few control the economic fate of masses. Politically, American leaders can destroy more lives “with the wave of a finger”³³ than churches can heal through years of baptism and evangelistic work. This makes the work of the church even more important. Faith, he claims, provides believers with hope and fulfillment. Jackson argues that black churches give believers hope but lack fulfillment. While praising the ministries of King, Adam Clayton Powell, and Nat Turner, Jackson states that the black church has let its white counterpart off the hook on such matters. Blacks still live under the pall of racial inferiority. White people, therefore, can maintain their status as racially superior. (White churches, he maintains, give their people neither hope nor fulfillment.) Jackson argues that the “American presupposition” of such things as wealth, race, labor, and religion need revision. In his address “In Search of a New Focus and a New Vision,” Jackson states

that the nation's structure is faulty and its purpose requires a new definition. African Americans are a necessary part of this re-envisioning and redefining. For Jackson, black people have a special mission in America. The race has a divine purpose in this land.

Within Jackson's public faith is a black messianic understanding of the African American experience. On at least two separate occasions, Jackson states the divine mission of black people in America. In the 1970 address on Christianity, to what must have been a predominantly white audience, Jackson states, "America has built upon our shoulders. We can help determine its destiny. And that's why I plead with Black people not to hate you, not to try to run away from you. God was operating at his providential best when he sent us here to be saviors of the human race not as slaves of white men."³⁴ At another event, his address "Liberation and Justice" struck a similar chord. Jackson claims, "We're not slaves brought here to serve white folks. We're God's children sent here to save the human race."³⁵ While Jackson is not the first African American leader to embrace such a view, his messianic understanding of the black race is significant in light of his national campaigns for the presidency. But Jackson holds that the "economic generation" he fights for cannot come without the participation of the black masses. His rhetoric has as its aim spiritual renewal and political education. Jackson attempts to connect the political to the spiritual in all of his sermons and addresses.

Jackson is a political revivalist/evangelist. While aided some by his theological formation in seminary, Jackson draws from several streams of black faith from the dawn and twilight of the civil rights era. While mastering none of them, he constructed a political evangelism that sought to educate African American people about their divine and social rights. Jackson adapted within what James Melvin Washington calls the three cultural strands of political praxes in black Christendom: folk, bourgeois, and urban. These strata find expression in revivalistic, pastoral, and prophetic political functions. At their best, these cultural strands fight white supremacy. Jackson merges them to do just that. He expressed his public faith through black political revivalism. Washington writes, "Black political revivalism includes the use of sermonic folk discourse and a complex of cultural praxes that are all rooted in the distinctive spirituality of black Christianity."³⁶ Manning Marable echoes that thought in his description of Jackson's 1984 presidential campaign: "The campaign throughout retained both the character of a Black religious revival, and the special idealism which motivated desegregation efforts of the 1960's."³⁷ Washington argued that Jackson displayed his political ingenuity by reforming the techniques of black political revivalism. That reform helped Jackson transfer

a primarily southern movement to northern urban areas without losing the movement's southern agrarian ethos.³⁸

Washington highlights another key component of Jackson's public faith. Citing Jackson's continued membership in the National Baptist Convention USA (NBCUSA), Washington labels Jackson's theology "conservative" and "evangelical." Jackson remained a member of the denomination after the infamous split between black Baptists who started the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC) and the leadership of the NBCUSA. Joseph Harrison Jackson, the NBCUSA president, at the time of the split sought to discredit Martin Luther King Jr. and his form of activism. J. H. Jackson was convinced that the civil rights movement displayed Communist tendencies. He also embraced some conservative social policies and supported Richard Nixon's presidential bid. Jesse Jackson, moreover, made a deliberate choice in his denominational affiliation. King was a part of the group that formed the PNBC, but Jackson remained with the NBCUSA. Washington writes, "Despite Jesse's fierce ideological disagreements with Reverend Joseph Harrison Jackson, he never left the National Baptist Convention. One explanation for this is Jackson's basically conservative evangelical theology, which was evident, for example, in his initial opposition to abortion and homosexual rights. The convention's powerful black folk spirituality, its traditional evangelical theology, and, from a historical viewpoint, its atypical political conservatism—thanks to Joseph Jackson—vied successfully for Jesse Jackson's allegiance."³⁹ Washington's claim has merit. But Jackson's conservative evangelical beliefs are just a part of his public faith. His tendency to grab from the varied offerings of black Christian beliefs undercuts a clear label outside of his function as political revivalist.

*PRAGMATIC HARMONY OF A BLACK
SOCIAL "AMERICAN" GOSPEL*

Samuel DeWitt Proctor saw himself as the theological bridge between his black social gospel theology and the emerging voices of black conservative ideology, black and womanist theologies, and the black Christian political and economic uplift traditions of public faith in the post-segregation era. With the common ground being a vocation that seeks to contest white supremacist practices in their varied forms, Proctor appealed to a universal Christ whose life and ethical teachings meshed well with a class-conscious black middle-class ethos of Proctor's generation. Proctor was a bridge between black theological traditions. His understanding of the Christian gospel was a type of pragmatic middle ground of black public faith. His race-conscious approach to theology eyed the

uplift of black humanity and the gradual social-moral unification of humanity. This black social gospel included a race-conscious but universal public faith that fought racism for the sake of genuine community.

Proctor grew up with the hope of the integration of the races. His “black world” made space for few interactions with white persons, and boundaries were seldom crossed. But Proctor’s family embedded within his psyche no need of a “black” theological system. Everything was already black, mostly. He mastered the black bourgeois education that he received from his parents. They were graduates of a post-Reconstruction denominational home mission college. As Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham notes, these schools sought to make good citizens of black students by assimilating them into white culture.⁴⁰ Preparation for citizenship looked a lot like modeling the value systems and “style” of white people. This was a part of Proctor’s education. The new world of his adulthood, therefore, validated the findings of his rearing. If one were to live into a life of respectability that came with the cultivation of the black bourgeois ethic, one could enter a mainstream America that made room for the one who prepared. He had faith in this America. He was the recipient of a white benefactor for seminary. He interacted with white people within the Northern (later American) Baptist Convention. He was a part of a second wave of black religious intellectuals who gained access to graduate theological education. He also worked for the United States government. Proctor comes close to embracing what James Melvin Washington calls the doctrine of integration.⁴¹ Proctor’s experiences do not justify this claim alone. But the experiences shaped his response to racism. A 1967 *Chicago Defender* article, “Some ‘Soul Culture’ Must Go if Integration Wins,”⁴² reported that Proctor cautioned his audience about what was needed to integrate into mainstream American society. Speaking “correct English” and learning algebra are a part of that assimilation. Proctor presupposed a desire by *the* black community to integrate. But he is a generational and ideological bridge.

In Proctor, the reader has an opportunity to see the influence and legacy of the black liberal theological tradition. His approach to the theology had the tint of Rauschenbusch’s social gospel ideas. The reader encounters in Proctor an intentional focus on the kingdom of God as the social-spiritual ideal. This is what Jesus taught, Proctor would tell you. His belief in the historical-critical approach to the Bible helped him see that. But the black liberal theological tradition had a focus on solving the racial problem, making *community* its goal. There remained in this tradition a hope in or naïveté about the inherent good of the American political structure. America needed the proper social and political education and interaction with the best and brightest of the Negro race to

see the problems in the social and political systems. The black social gospel tradition positioned itself on the front line to violate unjust laws and transgress, sometimes unsuspected, the boundaries of society. But while Proctor's views remain unchanged, perceptions of them have, so that he is now considered a moderate rather than a liberal. Other, more visible theological expressions gained steam to the right and left of him. More, however, on the specific expressions of Proctor's thought will follow.

COMMON ENEMY, DIVERSE TRAJECTORIES

The evolving race consciousness and radical nature of the Black Power movement challenged the presuppositions of the civil rights struggle. The incident between Carmichael and King is one instance of this fact. White backlash reinforced the "mythic" nature of black bourgeoisie claims to integration and called for a restatement and reinterpretation of the theology that existed in black Christianity. A "soul theology" became a necessity for African Americans who saw through the patronizing programming of white liberal theopolitical agendas. Cone is one example of the development of a theological system that sought to appreciate blackness for what it is. This would concern Proctor, however, due to a perception problem. "Black" became a volatile term in the post-segregation period. Proctor appreciated blackness. But he was concerned about a celebration of blackness and gender leading to a type of chauvinism that lacked pragmatic value to larger black Christian audiences.

Proctor differed from the womanist and black traditions in several ways. Proctor questioned the viability of a political and/or public theology that was just for African Americans. Although diplomatic in his critique, he maintained that black theology lacked the schematics and infrastructure of a movement and seemed somewhat isolated to conversations within the classrooms of mainline seminaries. The real substance of his challenge was a question of character. Is the gospel as narrow as a black theology would represent? While Proctor used experience as a primary locus of his theology, he believed in theology's universal nature. He once testified that he thought "all theology was liberation theology."⁴³ He wrote, "There is nothing angelic about being Black. Much of general theology applies to *all* Black people, as it does to everyone else."⁴⁴ He conceded that black and feminist theologies had good intentions. But he also questioned whether they were committed to going out of business when society catches up with their aims. That is a part of what Proctor called the "metes and bounds" of black theology. When it has run its course, "Black theologians should be the first to rejoice to see their witness become irrelevant and the 'metes and bounds' of Black theology get lost and erased in a new

emergence of strong and convincing movement toward a genuine community in the world.”⁴⁵ Proctor would have levied the same criticisms against womanist theology.⁴⁶ Incidentally, one may observe that Cone’s work questions the inherent justice in American democracy. Cone’s theology is a call for restructuring the social order. The American social structure is evil and produces racism. Proctor believed in the intrinsic fairness of American democracy. Its stage players, however, need moral reform.

Proctor was ambivalent about the value of black theology. He understood why theologians such as James Cone and J. Deotis Roberts wrote on the topic. Yet this did not persuade him of the authority of their claims. Proctor saw black theology as a contextual and transient discipline in theology. He accepted the aim of black theology, a theology that addresses the oppression and racial marginalization of blacks. But he argued that its major problem was its penchant for separatism. This comes across in the way he designates it “a hyphenated brand of theology.”⁴⁷

Proctor cherished the idea of an integrated community of races. His upbringing made the racial lines fluid to him in some ways. He navigated “white worlds” rather easily in his adult life. This may be a reason for his support of integration. Proctor discerned the type of concerns that labeling something black could create among whites. His response to black theology is not much different from the responses the term *Black Power* received from black integrationists and liberal white persons in its heyday. Proctor argues that the word *black* triggers the memory of a separated reality: “It is understandable that the term ‘Black theology’ would cause some apprehensiveness, because none of us enjoys these reminders of our scandalous separations in America. Hence it is embarrassing to admit that even theology reflects this separation. Blacks see God through the lenses of their experience.”⁴⁸

A 1969 article in the *Negro Digest* reveals that these sensitivities about the separation of the races were not new for Proctor.⁴⁹ In the article, he responds to the Black Manifesto’s call for a black university. He reasons that the racial signifier *black* was “associated with the riots and four letter words.” Although he did not understand why, Proctor claimed that using *black* as a modifier signaled violence to a larger audience. He did not diminish the value of having a black university, but he believed that the same objective could come through other means. Such was the case for his commentary on black theology. He did not deny a need for its existence but thought it could lead to further separation in an area of life that was universal—theology.

Proctor saw clear limits to black theology. For him, its “metes and bounds” lie in its praxis. When persons begin to address the issues that black theology

covers, there will no longer be a need for it. He staked his claim on his optimism. This was an optimism drawn from the content of his experiences. His hope was that there would no longer be a need for black theology. In addition, persons who are black and those who are not black experience similar issues. And “black” does not necessarily define one’s existence. Proctor argued that the experience defines the theology. Nonblack persons, therefore, can move vicariously and empathetically into the experience of African Americans, and vice versa. Proctor contended that persons have the ability to transgress and transcend the limits of their experiences and enter into group, class, and racially oppressive circumstances. They are able to enter the portals of another person’s experience.⁵⁰ Proctor’s background in the social gospel tradition may be another reason why he did not take to black theology. Proctor cared less about the color of the theology and more about what the theology addressed.

Other issues remain as points of contention between Proctor and the theological and political positions of E. V. Hill and Jesse Jackson. Proctor would call into question the value of Hill’s Jesus and Hill’s religious circle of friends. Proctor found the behavior of those persons and groups to be inconsistent with the witness of Jesus. Proctor would be concerned about the wisdom of siding with the same religious forces that created “Christian” academies to keep white children from attending integrated schools with black children. Theologically, Hill’s personal evangelism displayed a Jesus who was too heavenly for Proctor’s taste. Hill’s Jesus lacked the power of the ethical religion of God. The focus on a heavenly Jesus negates the saving power of the historical person. Hill’s literal reading of the Bible could not produce the kind of consistent ethical insight that years of science and human progress have manifested. Proctor quotes Adam Clayton Powell Jr. on such black conservatives: “I’ll never forget when he spoke in our college chapel in 1941, shortly after his election to the city council. ‘I can’t stand conservative Negroes,’ he said. ‘They don’t have a damn thing to conserve!’ I have never forgotten how vehement he was when he said that.”⁵¹

Proctor would temper Jackson’s black messianic vision. Always cautious about misrepresenting the black experience to larger audiences, Proctor would rather provide evidence of the social import of the black American contribution to the United States. Jackson was one of Proctor’s protégés, but Jackson’s confrontational approach to politics was not a part of Proctor’s playbook. The “rainbow” of theological ideas that Jackson espoused would also concern Proctor. Proctor could quantify his contribution in social victories and theological heirs. Jackson is one of them.

The vocation of black public faith in the post-segregation era remained and remains the fight against racism in American life. The changing dynamics

of the religious conversation in this period evinces this singular vocation in the thought of many black public faith advocates. Each of the persons listed in this chapter attempted and/or attempts to combat racism from his or her vantage point. All of their positions reflect critical points of departure for considering both the nature of black religious response traditions and their interactions. Their fight against racism, their vocation binds together these post-segregation-era voices. Be it the search for black solidarity or genuine community, the celebration of black women's experience, the quest for black political and economic freedom, or soul salvation—in all of these endeavors, racism challenged these black public faith advocates to respond. Copeland's keen insight about racism and the vocation of the theologian calls for action. Faithfulness to the aforementioned tasks that Copeland sets out equips the theologian for the work of truth telling. That truth has been necessary for black existence and remains necessary for the American experience. She writes, "In the twilight of American culture, telling the truth about white racist supremacy is a theological obligation, no matter how cauterizing these truths may be."⁵² Proctor taught and preached these truths.

Notes

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27. "Time Has Told the Story: E. V. Hill," *Fundamentalist Journal* 7, no. 2 (1988): 22–23.
28. Erin Curry, "E. V. Hill Remembered as Conservative African American Pastor, Civil Rights Leader," *Baptist Press*, February 26, 2003, <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=15322>.
29. Hill used the celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the Little Rock high school integration ceremony to emphasize this point. Billy Graham followed Hill by inviting the audience to accept God's gift of forgiveness. See Russell N. Dilday, "Little Rock 40th Anniversary Puts Focus on Reconciliation," *Baptist Press*, September 26, 1997, <http://www.bpnews.net/printerfriendly.asp?ID=4086>.
30. See James Melvin Washington, "Jesse Jackson and the Symbolic Politics of Black Christendom," in *African American Religious Thought: An Anthology*, ed. Cornel West and Eddie S. Glaude Jr. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003).
31. Jesse Jackson, "Christianity, the Church, and Racism," *Religious Education* 65, no. 2 (March–April 1970): 92–93.
32. *Ibid.*, 93.
33. *Ibid.*, 94.
34. *Ibid.*, 97.
35. Jesse Jackson, "Liberation and Justice," in *Straight from the Heart*, ed. Roger D. Hatch and Frank E. Watkins (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 62.
36. Washington, "Jesse Jackson and the Symbolic Politics of Black Christendom," 924.
37. Manning Marable, "The Rainbow Coalition: Jesse Jackson and the Politics of Ethnicity," *Cross Currents* (Spring 1984): 26.
38. As migration studies will show, numerous residents in the urban north had southern agrarian backgrounds. One key to Jackson's success may have been familial connection between northern and southern black people. Many black people in the north could sympathize with their southern family through psychic and social experiences, past and present.
39. Washington, "Jesse Jackson and the Symbolic Politics of Black Christendom," 932.

40. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

41. James Melvin Washington, ed., *Conversations with God: Two Centuries of Prayers by African Americans* (New York: Harper, 1994), xlvi. Washington wrote, “The doctrine of integration argued that African Americans needed to become as close to perfect copies of white people as possible.”

42. “Some ‘Soul Culture’ Must Go if Integration Wins,” *Chicago Defender*, January 14, 1967, 33.

43. Samuel D. Proctor, “The Rich Young Ruler,” sermon presented at the Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, 1980, UTS-PSCE.

44. Samuel D. Proctor, “The Metes and Bounds of Black Theology,” *Journal of Theology* 96 (1992): 39.

45. *Ibid.*, 41.

46. Proctor did not acknowledge womanist thought. His theological bibliography shrank after his graduate school days.

47. Proctor, “The Metes and Bounds of Black Theology,” 34. Proctor writes, “It appears that other theological labels somehow seem to belong: process theology, liberation theology, neo-orthodox theology, personalism, existentialism, Calvinism, mysticism, and fundamentalism; but Black theology has yet to earn its legitimacy. It does not quite make the canon.”

48. Martin Luther King Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here? Chaos or Community* (Boston: Beacon, 1968), 30. See also Proctor, “The Metes and Bounds of Black Theology,” 35. King reasoned with leaders of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) that the issue with Black Power is one of semantics.

49. Samuel D. Proctor, “Symposium: Black Educators Respond,” *Negro Digest* 18, no. 5 (1969): 71–73.

50. Proctor, “The Metes and Bounds of Black Theology,” 39. Proctor gave the example of white missionaries who live among and relate to indigenous peoples. They may experience discrimination from any number of groups, including the native groups.

51. Samuel DeWitt Proctor, *The Substance of Things Hoped For: A Memoir of African-American Faith*, with a foreword by Marian Wright Edelman (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1995), 148.

52. Copeland, “Race and the Vocation of the Christian Theologian,” 22.