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LET MY PEOPLE GO:
RELIGION IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT AND CHICANO MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

From the larger-than-life actors in the civil rights movement and the Chicano rights movement to the grassroots stories of pain and victory, activists utilized religion and its multiple facets and situated it at the center of these civil rights movements. Focusing on the period of 1955-1975, this thesis analyzes anecdotes, speeches, writings, and key events to demonstrate the significance of faith and the church in these movements, of which were not only factors of radicalization and activism, but in many circumstances were central to the origins and viability of these movements. Religion was critically utilized personally as motivation and as a source of dignity, corporately for rejuvenation and as a source of hope, and functionally as a meeting, operations, and planning center. Additionally, this thesis will broaden the analysis of religion in nationalist movements such as the advocacy Black Power and the reclamation of Aztlán, analyzing its role in nation-building, creating unity, and spurring a population towards a greater goal and significant purpose.

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Introduction

Speaking to the National Baptist Convention of 1956, Executive Secretary of the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Roy Wilkins offered, “we are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; cast down, but not destroyed ... Bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus.”¹ Wilkins addressed the crowd of black Baptist ministers in a volatile national climate created by recent civil rights victories, such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955 and the subsequent Supreme Court ruling that outlawed segregation in public transit.² The NAACP Executive Secretary continued, elaborating that his people will persevere due to their divine backing and endeavor. They would sustain and overcome injustice because of “the courage, the compassion, but above all, the faith of that dying, the faith that from the death there would arise a new and abundant life for all people forever ... Today all the people of our nation – white and black – need that compassion, that courage and that faith.”³ In a similar vein, César Chávez of the United Farm Workers (UFW) in the Southeastern United States argued that “we must join the struggle for what is right and just;” the struggle for Chicano labor rights.⁴ Inspiring his majority-Catholic crowd, Chávez included that “Jesus did not promise that it will be an easy way to live life and His own life certain points

¹ Roy Wilkins, “Speech to the National Baptist Convention,” in *Rhetoric, Religion and the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965*. Edited by Davis W. Houck and David E. Dixon. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006).

² Cheryl Bond-Nelms, “Boycotts, Movements and Marches,” Key Events During the Civil Rights Movement, Feb. 9, 2018. Accessed April 1, 2020, <https://www.aarp.org/politics-society/history/info-2018/civil-rights-events-fd.html>.

³ Wilkins, “Speech to the National Baptist Convention,” in *Rhetoric, Religion and the Civil Rights Movement*, 198.

⁴ United Farm Workers, “Education of the Heart: Cesar Chavez in his own words,” Cesar E. Chavez Foundation, April 3, 2017. Accessed Nov. 25, 2018, <https://ufw.org/research/history/education-heart-cesar-chavez-words/>.

in a hard direction; but it does not promise we will be ‘satisfied’ ... He promises that by giving life we will find life – full, meaningful life as God meant it.”⁵ With an audience of farm laborers and seasonal workers who were assaulted on the picket line and refused pay by their employers, among other injustices, Chávez strategically spoke by including Biblical references, knowing the culture and background of his audience.

Wilkins and Chávez, both leaders of their respective movements exemplify the integrality of faith in American civil rights. In a period of history in which staunch conservatives and anti-communists labeled progressive ideals as “communist” or “radical,” more secular ideologies, activists within civil rights and nationalist movements labored intentionally and genuinely to incorporate religion in their activism.

Historians have generally only included religion as a motivating mechanism and instrumental facet in the expansion of American Conservatism and the rise of the New Right.⁶ Literature such as Howard Zinn’s *A People’s History of the United States: 1492-2001* paints the African American movement as a Communist-inspired revolution because “the Negro was not as anti-Communist as the white population. He could not afford to be – his friends were so few.”⁷ Regarding the Chicano movement, historians like Eric Foner in *Give Me Liberty! An American History* portray César Chávez as a charismatic leader and inspirational orator, much like Dr. Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., however this analysis does not offer a complete history of the movements or the people within them.

⁵ United Farm Workers, “Education of the Heart.”

⁶ Todd Gitlin. *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1994); Eric Foner. *Give me Liberty: An American History*. Seagull Fourth Ed. Vol. 2. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014)

⁷ Howard Zinn, *A People’s History of the United States: 1492-2001*. (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 448

Rather, activists utilized religion personally, congregationally, and functionally to overcome and navigate the injustices and oppressions that they faced in society. Therefore, the New Right and conservatism did not monopolize religious ideals nor their strategic incorporation in activism, but in much of the same ways, advocates for equality equipped their faith and church for their own fight. In the context of violence, hatred, and oppression in private and public sectors, the African American and Chicano populations utilized their rich religious history, traditions, culture, and relationships, to fight, cope, and overcome the injustices they face in the United States.

Furthermore, histories that do include a religious characterization of the Civil Rights Movement and Chicano Movements do not extend this analysis through the pride and power movements of the later 1960s and early 1970s.⁸ While activists continued to genuinely and strategically incorporate their religious resources in the fight, theologies and congregations adapted to the Black Power Movement and incorporated more radical and militant beliefs as compared to the Classic Civil Rights Movement. Similarly, the Chicano Movement evolved in the 1970s by taking advantage of deep indigenous and Catholic roots to advocate for a racial and geographic exodus to their “homeland.”⁹

For the purpose of this thesis, the term “church” refers to both the congregation of people and the structural facility in which they meet within the Christian faith. It is within this context that the church as a facility, including its sanctuaries, meeting rooms, and other religious places of worship, lent itself to these movements out of necessity. Lack of land and property ownership

⁸ Kevin Mumford, *Newark: A History of Race, Rights, and Riots in America*. (New York: New York University Press, 2007); Randy J. Ontiveros, *In the Spirit of a New People: The Cultural Politics of the Chicano Movement*. (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

⁹ Richard L. Nostrand, *The Hispano Homeland*. (Norma, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996).

often joins in tandem with societal oppression; therefore, their churches served as a sort of headquarters.

Activists appealing to and citing religious ideals turned race relations into a spiritual and moral problem above a political and social problem. These movements rhetorically employed religion with intentional consideration to their American audience, of which through the 1950s and 1970s were dominated by the “Protestant establishment,” even despite the cultural revolution of the 1960s and subsequent decade.¹⁰

Religion operated as a motivating mechanism that taught Americans their self-worth and dignity, leading them to break the mold and advocate for a quality of life and a system better than that which they found themselves. Faith extended personally by radicalizing certain individuals to take drastic measures, some of which were also militant. Furthermore, an activist’s personal faith in the traditional African American and Chicano Movements, is evidenced to have been utilized as a reminder and re-centering awareness to remain non-violent and avoid retaliating against whomever was swearing at, spitting on, or kicking them. Similarly, nationalist movements also equipped religion as a function of identity and unity. Common histories separate religion from nationalism, withholding faith from progression out of the classical period, however resources complicate this and suggest that just like many other facets of activism, religion adapted to the growing frustration that oppressed communities felt at the turn of the 1960s. In so doing, movements equipped religion as a source of promise and purpose, a unifying factor, that contributed into the us-versus-them mentality.

¹⁰ Joanne Beckman, “Religion in Post-World War II America,” National Humanities Center at Duke University, n.d. Accessed Feb. 23, 2020, <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/twenty/tkeyinfo/trelww2.htm>.

The Civil Rights Era, much like the rest of American history, is not void of religion and faith. Critics such as senator Joseph McCarthy or the Christian Anti-Communist Crusade labeled many activists and movements as communist or radical.¹¹ However texts, events, and speeches evidence that religious faith occupied a central role in advocating for a better society. Furthermore, these same sources complicate the sharp distinction between the more radical late 1960s and 1970s to the 1950s and early 1960s. Activists did not discard the use of religion with the death of Martin Luther King Jr., rather they maintained its utility or repurposed it to the climate of the various movements.

Through the course of three chapters, this thesis will analyze sources spanning from the 1950s through the 1970s and related memoirs, oral histories, and autobiographies in order to exemplify the integral role faith and the church played in the Civil Rights Era. Chapter One will focus on the Classical Civil Rights Era, focusing on the likes of Martin Luther King Jr. and Bayard Rustin, while also examining key events in the timeline of Black America's fight for equality. Chapter two will then focus on the Chicano Movement and the grassroots activism that stemmed from it. Lastly, Chapter three will carry the conversation and analysis to Nationalist movements, looking more broadly at Black Power and Chicano nationalism.

¹¹ Christian Anti-Communist Crusade, "The Black 'Ghetto' – A Communist Sanctuary," in *The Schwarz Report*, Sept. 1, 1969. Accessed April 15, 2020, <http://www.schwarzreport.org/uploads/schwarz-report-pdf/schwarz-report-1969-09-01.pdf>.

Chapter 1

Civil Rights Movement

Introduction

Despite the progress of the civil rights movement through the 1950s, much of the country remained segregated and African Americans experienced suffering, violence, and persecution by a white majority avidly against the equality of their black counterparts and the subsequent release of their societal stronghold. Groups such as the Ku Klux Klan attempted to dissuade black citizens from getting involved in the movement with church bombings, lynchings, and cross burnings, among other tactics, however activists were not deterred. Born in 1954, Glenda Funchess attended a Freedom School and cited the Freedom Summer of 1964 as the turning point in her life, in which she decided to attend college and become a civil rights attorney. Her local church, Mount Zion Baptist in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, harbored the Freedom School because of which she did not refer to her church as a Baptist denomination, rather a “Freedom, Civil Rights Church.”¹² On getting involved in the movement and attending civil rights training, she attributes her initial interest and cause of joining to her pastor who “urged us to get involved ... so they opened up the church doors for Freedom School, so being a member then, I went.”¹³

Funchess’ story is not unique, but rather is shared amongst other activists in the civil rights movement. A story of average and typical African American citizens becoming radicalized and spurred on to fight for civil rights through the opportunities, education, and resources provided them by their local churches. Importantly, while Conservatism rose and the Evangelical

¹² Emilye Crosby. Interview with Glenda Funchess. *Southern Oral History Project*, Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of African American History & Culture and the Library of Congress, Dec. 2, 2015.

¹³ Crosby, Interview with Funchess.

Right rooted itself through the 1960s, the equipping of religion in politics also existed on the Left.

Labeled by historians the Rise of the New Right, America was undergoing ideological tension with an increasingly progressive Democratic Party led by the likes of Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy and President Lyndon B. Johnson which put Blue southerners in powerful opposition to their party leaders. While this trend is evident throughout the 1960s, it is most salient during the post-war Black Freedom Struggle. Before reaching the Supreme Court in 1967, *Loving v. Virginia*, a case involving the legality of interracial marriage, was decided by Caroline County Court Judge Leon Bazile. Siding with the state, Judge Bazile explained that “Almighty God created the races white, black ... and he placed them on separate continents ... The fact that he separated the races shows that he did not intend for the races to mix.”¹⁴ Later in 1963, in his infamous inauguration speech, Alabama Governor George Wallace reasoned that the cultural and political climate advocating for desegregation is “a system that is the very opposite of Christ for it feeds and encourages everything degenerate and base in our people as it assumes the responsibilities we ourselves should assume.”¹⁵ Governor Wallace and Judge Bazile demonstrate the utilization of religious rhetoric to not only justify segregation and oppression but as a means to appeal to the alienated Conservatives in the South.

Various religious histories stop there, though, with religion only motivating the Right, which offers an incomplete history.¹⁶ The Left equally possessed Christian motivation and strategy, specifically in its advocacy for equal rights for African Americans. Secularizing the

¹⁴ *Commonwealth v. Richard Perry Loving and Mildred Dolores Jeter*, 1958-1966. Caroline County (Va.) Reel 79.

¹⁵ George Wallace. “Inaugural Address,” (Speech, Montgomery, AL, Jan. 14, 1963), Alabama Department of Archives & History, digital.archives.alabama.gov/cdm/singleitem/collection/voices/id/2952/rec/5.

¹⁶ Gitlin, *The Sixties*; David Farber. *The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994); Foner, *Give me Liberty*.

Left ignores the importance of Christianity throughout the Civil Rights Era. Christian faith and rhetoric were widely employed by civil rights activists such as Bayard Rustin and Melba Pattillo Beals.

Christianity played a leading role functionally, strategically, and personally amongst activists. The church as a space was utilized for planning purposes and as a safe haven or sanctuary for members of the Black community that regularly experience racial intimidation when attempting to vote, violent interruption when trying to order a meal at a lunch counter, or hate-inspired speech when walking into the doors of a middle school. Furthermore, public institutions of local government or schools were simply not available for their political purposes. In a segregated society both legislatively and socially, the church existed as the only place to meet safely and plan civil rights protests. The faith was also used for its spiritual practices in both the person and the congregation. From rejuvenating the purpose or motivation of a mass of people to the mental meditations and memories that activists used on an individual basis, the teachings of the Bible were employed to re-center and refocus the movement. Indeed, Christianity was used by activists, similarly to the Evangelical Right, by appealing to the masses through strategic rhetoric in media speeches, private letters, and non-violent protests. This was not only evident in outreach to their fellow Black brothers and sisters but was crucial in convincing and advancing the cause to White Christians, appealing to their morality. While historical understandings of faith in the movement seem to center on high profile individuals such as Dr. King, the church itself and religion at large played a more significant role in the grass roots of the movement and in the functionality of integral protests to the movement.

Church as a Space

Throughout the Civil Rights Era, the church was more than a place of worship or a place in which you see friends and family on Sunday mornings. For the Movement, it was an integral part of planning, organizing, and strategizing, but importantly, it was safe from midnight kidnappings, fists at the poll booth, and police batons on the public bus. The church worked as a space for people that were segregated and oppressed in the general population. Therefore, it was a place in which disenfranchised by gender or race could partake in politics through advice or direct action. It was in this time, through a hyper-segregated South and de-facto segregated North, that the church offered itself as a hotbed to African American political activism.¹⁷ The church was used across the board for political meetings including the Southern Christian Leadership Conference under Dr. King, but also the NAACP and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), among many other organizations.¹⁸

This strategic and functional utilization of the church proves extremely evident in the famous bus boycott in Montgomery, AL that overnight saw 90 percent of African Americans abstaining from the public transit system.¹⁹ But how could an entire city coordinate such a large-scale boycott? Following the arrest of Rosa Parks for not sacrificing her seat on a public bus to a white patron as was law and custom, virtual entirety of the black population of the city banded together through the efforts of Jo Ann Robinson, ministers from Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, and the media. The vast majority of the city's African American population refrained from using

¹⁷ Traci Parker, *Department Stores and the Black Freedom Movement: Workers, Consumers, and Civil Rights from the 1930s to the 1980s*. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

¹⁸ Joseph Mosnier, Ph.D. Interview with Courtland Cox. *Southern Oral History Project*, Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History & Culture and the Library of Congress, July 8, 2011.

¹⁹ Stanford University, "Montgomery Bus Boycott." Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute, n.d. Accessed Oct. 11, 2019, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/montgomery-bus-boycott>.

the public transit system, however a boycott of that scale necessitated in-depth preparation, effort, and planning if it were to be prolonged and continued; the bus system could survive a one-day protest.²⁰ Therefore, later that evening Holt Street Baptist Church was filled to the rafters with citizens, and the congregation voted to prolong the protest started by Robinson, thus formalizing the boycott.²¹ The Montgomery Improvement Association was formed and with members packed shoulder-to-shoulder in the church, cheers and applause shook its foundation as Dr. King famously exclaimed from the pulpit, “and we are not wrong ... if we are wrong, God Almighty is wrong.”²²

Those gathering that evening, though, would not have known that the boycott would go on to last over 380 days, and moreover its duration did not experience a shortage of retribution and penalties for being involved.²³ Commonly, those offering carpools, simply walking to work regularly, or offering taxi cab rides for the boycotters were ticketed, arrested, or their insurance was nearly doubled.²⁴ Additionally, those participating in the boycott or those that were sympathetic to the cause dealt with other realistic financial burdens such as car repairs, gasoline, food, or other such necessities such as shoes or bikes. It was in this atmosphere that the local church satisfied the need of the people and arguably was central in prolonging the boycott. While the MIA and strategic leaders were important for organizing the elaborate carpool system, the fundamental need for money and financing the boycott was satisfied by the black church.

²⁰ Danielle L. McGuire. *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance – A new History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010).

²¹ McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street*, 81.

²² “(1955) Martin Luther King Jr., ‘The Montgomery Bus Boycott.’” Blackpast.org, 2012. Accessed Oct. 2, 2019, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1955-martin-luther-king-jr-montgomery-bus-boycott/>.

²³ Crystal Sanders, Ph.D. “The Montgomery Bus Boycott.” Post-WWII Civil Rights Era, The Pennsylvania State University, Sept. 25, 2019.

²⁴ Sanders, “The Montgomery Bus Boycott.”

For example, in the Holt Street Baptist Church, there was a friendly competition between two groups of elderly black women that would compete in bake sales, raising money for the boycott. The Club from Nowhere and The Friendly Club would bake regularly throughout the week, disguising their motivation behind vague names, then donate their proceeds to the church, to then be disseminated to those helping the boycott and were in need.²⁵ Furthermore, the weekly funds raised by the congregations of local churches would be collected and given to the MIA in order to support the protest. This trend existed throughout the entirety of the United States with various churches raising as much as they could to be sent South in support of the Movement. Jamila Jones contributed as a 16-year-old gospel singer, forming the Montgomery Gospel Trio with Gladys Carter and Minnie Hendricks, singing for the Mt. Zion A.M.E. Zion Church. Jones would go on to become more politically involved as a member of the Freedom Singers, however in these adolescent years, she toured from Alabama to New York, recording and singing freedom songs to raise money through fundraisers and donations for the Southern Movement.²⁶ The same happened in Mobile, AL at the Warren Street United Methodist Church under Rev. Joseph Lowery. During a service, he announced that the congregation together with the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance of Mobile “had a paper sack full of money, [to which] the crowd went wild.²⁷ They had collected over \$5,000 which would be taken to the Montgomery Improvement Association in support of the boycott.

From these examples and the fact that more African Americans attended church and were more religious than any other racial group in the United States, it is evident how important and

²⁵ McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street*, 97.

²⁶ Joseph Mosnier, Ph.D. Interview with Jamila Jones. *Southern Oral History Project*, Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of African American History & Culture and the Library of Congress, April 27, 2011.

²⁷ Joseph Mosnier, Ph.D. Interview with Joseph E. Lowery. *Southern Oral History Project*, Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of African American History & Culture and the Library of Congress, June 6, 2011.

significant it was as a space, one in which they spent time as children and continued to devote much of their service to as adults.²⁸ At mass meetings one church-goer described that they “felt invincible ... [and] knew that God was going to protect us ... We *knew* there was divine intervention, so, basically, there was no fear.”²⁹ It developed into a type of sanctuary for African Americans in the South, an atmosphere in which the public-school system, city businesses, and local government municipal buildings were off limits, either by state legislation or social pressure.³⁰ In the public vacuum created by segregation, the church filled the void.

The 1965 march from Selma to Montgomery, AL evidences this, in which activists including Dr. King and Amelia Boynton Robinson, attempted to organize in opposition to the voting laws in Alabama. Despite the recent passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; in Selma, a town that was 50 percent Black, only 300 African American citizens were registered to vote.³¹ Three marches took place, however due to complications through the first and second march a violent struggle ensued. In that moment a picture of the innate safety of the church is recognized. The first attempt of the march has infamously come to be known as Bloody Sunday, in which shortly after leaving Brown Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church on March 7, 1965, the marchers were met by town hoodlums and Alabama State Troopers. Using teargas and billy clubs on horseback, the marchers were decimated, including Boynton Robinson whose ragged body lying under a policeman on horseback was broadcast across American media; a true

²⁸ David Masci, “5 facts about the religious lives of African Americans.” Factank: News in the Numbers, *Pew Research Center*, Feb. 7, 2018. Accessed April 15, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/02/07/5-facts-about-the-religious-lives-of-african-americans/>.

²⁹ Joseph Mosnier, Ph.D. Interview with Gwendolyn M. Patton. *Southern Oral History Project*, Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of African American History & Culture and the Library of Congress, June 1, 2011.

³⁰ “Segregation in the United States.” History.com, 2019. Accessed Oct. 2, 2019, <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/segregation-united-states>.

³¹ Nikki L. M. Brown and Barry M. Stentiford. *The Jim Crow Encyclopedia: Greenwood Milestones in African American Society*. (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2008).

depiction of a war zone within the contiguous United States.³² Significantly, though, following the anarchy that ensued and the struggle between non-violence and oppression, the marchers fled back across the bridge in which they crossed to the Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church. This shows a sense of safety recognized by the African American community. Their instinctual reaction was to turn back and flee to the church building. Instead of scattering or fighting back, the crowd that was able made their way back to the sanctity and safety of the church.

The Freedom Rides of 1961 also exemplify the concept of church as a safe haven following the beating of the second wave of Riders. In order to rejuvenate the crowd and show a stand of unity among the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement, Dr. King called for a mass meeting at the First Baptist Church in Montgomery, AL. With over 1,500 people in attendance, the meeting was typical of those of Dr. King, including Black ministers preaching, a loud rambunctious crowd, and hymns song among the congregation.³³ While the fact that the meeting was called to a church building reinforces its functionality and use, the situation evidences the church as a sanctuary. Shortly after the meeting began on May 21, 1961, the church became surrounded by over 3,000 enraged White Supremacists that yelled and threw rocks and other objects through the windows of the church. It was in this episode that Dr. King's stature wavered and his ability to remain calm was challenged. Standing at the pulpit, captured in a video from the congregation, Dr. King appeared visibly disturbed, anxious, and at a loss for words with impending harm and death looming outside of the church; all that he was able to do was plead to the Attorney General for federal action, otherwise 1,500 African Americans were to be

³² Roy Reed. "57 Are Injured at Selma as Troopers Break up Rights Walk in Montgomery." *The New York Times*, March 1965, <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/big/0307.html?module=inline>.

³³ Stanley Nelson. *Freedom Riders*. Streaming, Kanopy.com. (New York: Firelight Media, 2010).

slaughtered.³⁴ Though Dr. King was not naïve to the fact that the church did not grant ultimate invincibility from danger, his reactions exhibit a sense of desperation. When other public institutions and meeting places did not grant the same sense of safety as the church building, impending threats upon its sanctity were that much more grievous.

The 16th Street Baptist Church Bombing in Birmingham on September 15, 1963 furthermore evidences the compounded impact of racial attacks when they took place around or within a church.³⁵ Conducted by four members of the Ku Klux Klan, the bombing killed four girls aged 11 to 14 on their typical Sunday morning.³⁶ As they were getting dressed in their robes to take part in the service's choir, at least 15 sticks of dynamite exploded, causing bodies to fly through the air, windows to shatter, darting glass to shred nearby bodies, and the walls to fall in through the basement.³⁷ It was not simply the death of four little girls and the injury of 22 others, the sticks of dynamite placed under the steps of the entrance of the church were placed at the gateway into safety and sanctuary for African Americans. It was a direct attack on their home soil, their base, their safe haven. Dr. Freeman Hrabowski III was a member at the Sixth Avenue Baptist Church, a sister church to 16th Street, who personally knew Cynthia Wesley, one of the four girls that died in the bombing. Recalling the incident, he explained how his preacher stopped mid-sermon at the pulpit to notify the crowd, "but it was the first time we'd ever seen

³⁴ Nelson, *Freedom Riders*.

³⁵ Doug Jones and Greg Truman. *Bending Toward Justice: The Birmingham Church Bombing that Changed the Course of Civil Rights*. (New York: All Points Books, 2019).

³⁶ Mark Gado. "The Birmingham Church Bombing: Birmingham." Crime Library, n.d. Accessed Oct. 7, 2019, https://web.archive.org/web/20150210044214/http://www.crimelibrary.com/terrorists_spies/terrorists/birmingham_church/4.html.

³⁷ Michele Norris. "Father Recalls Deadly Blast at Ala. Baptist Church." *NPR*, 2008. Accessed Oct. 12, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=94640715>.

church stop in the middle. It had to be bad.”³⁸ Many of the teenagers going to the two churches attended the same school, and before choking up and being unable to continue telling the story, Dr. Hrabowski stated “we had nightmares for years. It was like war. It was just awful.”³⁹ He continued saying that his parents drove the family home because they did not know if another church was going to be bombed. Indeed, fear soon consumed the African American population, not knowing which church would be bombed next, or if their church would be bombed.⁴⁰

Commemorating the 56th anniversary of the bombing, WRBC news of central Alabama exhibits the historic effect of the violence in the church, stating “Addie, Carol, Denise, and Cynthia. They are names well-known among the people of Birmingham. But Johnnie and Virgil are two names maybe not everyone has heard.”⁴¹ On the same day of the bombing, a police officer shot 16-year-old Johnnie Robinson in the back and a two white teenage fired at 13-year-old Virgil Ware who sat on the handle bars of his brother’s bike. While the nation erupted in 1963 over the bombing at the church, the two boys murdered in the streets of Birmingham that same day did not receive the same media attention or national sympathy. This underlines the perception of innocence that the little girls received, but it importantly demonstrates that significant factor of the church as well. Following the bombing, the *Chicago Tribune* assembled a collection of editorials from multiple newspapers regarding the “New Outrage in

³⁸ Joseph Mosnier, Ph.D. Interview with Freeman Hrabowski III. *Southern Oral History Project*, Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of African American History & Culture and the Library of Congress, July 14, 2011.

³⁹ Mosnier, Interview with Hrabowski III.

⁴⁰ Joseph Mosnier, Ph.D. Interview with Marilyn Hildreth. *Southern Oral History Project*, Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of African American History & Culture and the Library of Congress, May 24, 2011.

⁴¹ Ashley Night, “Remembering the two boys killed same day as church bombing.” *WBRC Fox 6 News*, Sept. 13, 2019. Accessed April 27, 2020, <https://www.wbrc.com/2019/09/14/remembering-two-boys-killed-same-day-church-bombing/>.

Birmingham.”⁴² One editorialist from the *Montgomery Advisor* questioned, “what kind of creature is it that would snuff out the lives of children innocently at church on a Sunday morning?”⁴³ Another contributor wrote in the *N.Y. Herald Tribune*, “worst of all, the victims were innocent children, and the scene of the crime was a holy place, dedicated to the worship of God. Only criminal insanity can explain such a despicable act.”⁴⁴ In comparison, national outrage did not ensue following the news of the two slain boys. Instead, the police officer who shot Robinson found justification in the fact that he encountered the boy throwing rocks at a car with white passengers, and the court system upheld the two boys who killed Ware as exceptional Eagle Scouts, sentencing them to six months in juvenile prison.⁴⁵

Spiritual Practice

Religion did not only play a functional role in the Civil Rights Movement through the facility use of churches and congregational meetings, but it also was utilized personally to remind, re-center, and motivate. Though many histories cover the spiritual practices of leaders such as Dr. King or Rev. Ralph Abernathy, civil rights activists at the grassroots level latched onto their spiritual upbringing and adapted it to motivate their struggle for equality under the law. The average African American had many motivations for equality and freedom, however in

⁴² “Round Up of Editorial Views on Birmingham: New Outrage in Birmingham,” *The Chicago Defender (National Edition) (1921-1967)*, Sept. 21, 1963, <https://search-proquest-com.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/news/docview/493053373/abstract/D012361E1544BAAPQ/12?accountid=13158>.

⁴³ *The Chicago Defender*, “Round Up of Editorial Views.”

⁴⁴ *The Chicago Defender*, “Round Up of Editorial Views.”

⁴⁵ Robert Gordon, “Birmingham Pays Homage to Slain Teen-Age Boys.” *Atlanta Daily World (1923-2003)*, Sept. 24, 1963, <https://search-proquest-com.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/news/docview/491295140/50D63CE90EA740EBPQ/7?accountid=13158>.

his reflective memoir, activist Bayard Rustin highlights that “above all he possesses a rich religious heritage and today finds the church the center of his life.”⁴⁶

Through his experience of nonviolence and his dedication to the cause, Bayard Rustin, a leader in the Movement, exemplifies the personal use of Christianity. Though he, like others, recognized their self-worth and dignity as taught in the Bible, he equipped himself for nonviolence through the teachings of the Bible. In 1942, long before the Montgomery Bus Boycott and others like it, Rustin booked a trip from Louisville to Nashville and sat in the second row of the bus. After refusing to move following the yelling, pulling, and emotion distress of the bus driver, the police were summoned. It was at this moment that Rustin was dragged out of the bus, kicked and beaten by three police officers, then thrown into the back of a police cruiser for a 13-mile drive to the capital, in which through the duration, he was sworn at and chastised. Sitting between two police officers with two more in the front, Rustin found himself “shaking with nervous strain,” so he took out a piece of paper and pencil and “began to write from memory a chapter from one of Paul’s letters.”⁴⁷ Arriving to the station, Rustin was then stationed in front of the captain, opening up with “What can I do for you?” The captain replied, “N-----, you’re supposed to be scared when you come in here!” Rustin calmly looked at the man, saying “I am fortified by truth, justice, and Christ ... There’s no need for me to fear.”⁴⁸ Religion was crucial in the case of Rustin. By memorizing passages of the Bible and relying on the eternal judgement of Christ, he reminded himself of non-violence and aptly remained calm while at the hands of a corrupt justice system.

⁴⁶ Bayard Rustin. *Down the Line: The Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin*. Edited by C. Vann Woodward. (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971).

⁴⁷ Rustin, *Down the Line*, 6.

⁴⁸ Rustin, *Down the Line*, 7.

The same was true for Robert G. Clark Jr., an activist in 1960s Mississippi. Coming from a family of former slaves - in fact, his grandfather came from a plantation - Clark learned from an early age about Christianity, professing his faith at the age of three.⁴⁹ In church, he additionally learned self-worth and dignity, but he was importantly instructed and urged from the pulpit to register to vote. From that point on, he sought an education to be able to enlighten others just as he had. During Freedom Summer in Mississippi, Clark worked to register and educate voters throughout the state. This culminated into his nomination by the Freedom Democratic Party as a candidate for the Mississippi House of Representatives, leading to his election as the first African American representative of the state legislature since the Reconstruction Era. While he would go on to higher office and more significant positions in the legislature, Clark explained that “religion was very, very important ... that has carried me thus far.”⁵⁰ In his case, Clark latched onto the religious motivation to be politically educated and involved, just as he had learned as a child on Sundays. This motivated him to disseminate the same truths for others and ultimately convinced him to run for political office.

The personal nature of religion contributed significantly to the motivation and radical action taken by women throughout the movement. While various organizations and even churches would downgrade women to supportive roles, letting the pastors and ministers lead, female activists found purpose in their faith.⁵¹ Considering the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, women occupied an important and influential role in the dissemination, organizing, and ultimate success of the party. Fannie Lou Hamer, Victoria Gray, and Annie Devine were three

⁴⁹ Joseph Mosnier, Ph.D. Interview with Robert G. Clark, Jr. *Southern Oral History Project*, Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History & Culture and the Library of Congress, March 13, 2013.

⁵⁰ Mosnier, Interview with Clark, Jr.

⁵¹ McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street*, 97.

central figures to the movement for political equality and representation during that election, however prior to 1964 none of the women knew each other or had any connection, but nonetheless worked in dramatic fashion to dismantle the segregationist Democratic Party. Gray later recalled that throughout that campaign, the “one thing we have in common, we’re deeply spiritual people; that is the one common denominator.”⁵² Hamer further exemplifies this faith from her excruciating torture at the hands of the justice system. On that night, when she was brutalized and terrorized, she sang into the darkness of the prison cell:

Paul and Silas was [sic] bound in jail, let my people go.
 Had no money for to go their bail, let my people go.
 Paul and Silas began to shout, let my people go.
 Jail doors open and they walked out, let my people go.⁵³

In her song, Hamer references Paul and Silas, two central figures of the Bible who were beaten, jailed, tortured, and ultimately killed in the story of the Book of Acts. Through the severest turmoil in her life, Hamer resulted in singing the Gospel in order to cope with the trauma she had just endured and would have to suffer from for the rest of her life. Though she was known for her faith and her gospel singing, significance should be noted on the important role of her faith as a coping mechanism in the face of hate and pain.

Melba Pattillo Beals of the Little Rock Nine was no different than the previous individuals in the movement. On the contrary, though, her fame in activism came as a mere adolescent, a 14 year old, in the segregated public schools of Little Rock, Arkansas.⁵⁴ Though she knew of the physical and emotional harm that it would bring her, Beals volunteered without

⁵² Vicki Crawford. Interview with Victoria Gray Adams. In *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*. (New York: NYU Press, July 26, 1995).

⁵³ “‘I’m Not Backing Off’: Racism and the Undefeatable Faith of Fannie Lou Hamer.” *The Witness*, 2017. Accessed Oct. 14, 2019, <https://thewitnessbcc.com/hit-truth-racism-undefeatable-faith-fannie-lou-hamer/>.

⁵⁴ Melba Pattillo Beals. *White is a State of Mind: A Memoir*. (New York: Putnam’s Sons, 1999).

initial parental permission to be integrated into Central High School from Horace Mann High School three years after the formal judicial declaration that school segregation was illegal.

Taught from a young age to value her education and know her self-worth, Beals attributed her courage and strength to her “indestructible faith in God.” In this faith, she explains in her memoir that “I have ample evidence that ... with time and love, God solves all our problems.”⁵⁵ Through drive-by shootings, hate messages sprawled on the bathroom mirrors, apathetic teachers, excessive bullying, and even sprayed acid, the teenager kept a diary and prayer journal in which she would write to God. She was able to endure the unthinkable and persevere where many adults could not by having constant conversation with God. “I wore my knees out praying night after night - I even got up early to get in extra prayers,” Beals wrote, explaining that in prayer she could shed off the shame and indignity put upon her by the segregationist society in which she lived.⁵⁶ Similar to the other activists, Beals used her faith as a coping mechanism and strategy to re-center herself on the bigger picture and to maintain non-violence. By writing and praying to God, Beals reminded herself of her dignity and even increased her pride in the color of her skin.

Rhetoric and Strategy

Activists throughout the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott to Freedom Summer and the MFDP carefully selected every move, action, appearance, and word. Working upstream against the popular current of society, activists had to

⁵⁵ Melba Pattillo Beals. *Warriors Don't Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock's Central High*. (New York: Washington Square Press, 1994.)

⁵⁶ Beals, *Warriors Don't Cry*, 28.

meticulously critique, edit, and adapt what they did and said so as not to incriminate themselves and to attract sympathy from fellow African Americans and white citizens. Religious rhetoric was used throughout the Movement to appeal to the morality of America, therefore attracting sympathizers to the cause or compelling them to action. Importantly, this strategy was utilized to attract white Americans into the Black Freedom Struggle, which expedited the overall sympathy felt across America. By incorporating white Americans, the Movement could gain validity among the silent majority.

Given this context, Dr. King's Letter from a Birmingham Jail becomes more than a decree of non-violence and civil rights, but a plea to the church for his aid. Knowing that he can achieve sympathy by appealing to the religiously moral, King addresses "My Dear Fellow Clergymen," and writes a letter riddled with Biblical references and their parallels in the Civil Rights Movement.⁵⁷ Addressing the accusation against him as an outsider, he deduces, "just as the Apostle Paul left his village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to the far corners of the Greco Roman world, so am I compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own home town."⁵⁸ It is not a coincidence that a pastor, well-versed in the passages and stories of the Bible, would equate his journey to that which was commissioned to the Apostle Paul. Within his writings, Paul describes his commission as "a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God," therefore not pursuing self-righteousness and without personal ambition.⁵⁹ When writing his letter from jail to fellow Christians and clergymen, Dr. King would have been well aware of the connection and how it would be received, therefore he strategically

⁵⁷ Martin Luther King Jr. "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." Edited by Ali B. Ali-Dinar, Ph.D. African Studies Center, the University of Pennsylvania, 1963. Accessed Oct. 10, 2019, https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html.

⁵⁸ King, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail."

⁵⁹ Rom. 1:1 (NIV)

included the parallel to raise his commission in Birmingham to that of a holy stature. In so doing, Dr. King used Biblical rhetoric to attract both white and black Americans to the fight against racial injustice in the South.

Respectability politics was another central strategy to the Civil Rights Movement, that their representatives and leaders needed to be upstanding citizens, so that no condemnation or criticism could be held as credible.⁶⁰ Activists knew that black people existed in a world of white superiority, so they utilized the strategy of respectability through traditionalism and Christianity in order to bridge the divide between their situation and that of their racial counterparts. Therefore, in choosing a respectable person or increasing the credibility of a movement, the fact of being Christian brought to them a sense of traditionalism, womanhood, moral standing, or even sainthood. The Montgomery Bus Boycott, led by Dr. King, employed Christianity to build respectability from beginning to the end of their protest. During the mass meeting at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Rosa Parks was hailed as the perfect symbol of the boycott because “nobody can doubt the depth of her Christian commitment and devotion to the teachings of Jesus.”⁶¹ As is known now, Parks was an extremely involved activist and not giving up her seat on the bus was not happenstance. The leaders of the movement knew that Parks was an active member and leader in the NAACP, therefore they worked intentionally to characterize her as peaceful, innocent, and motherly.⁶² Additionally, the leaders worked diligently to brand the movement as Christian. Rev. Abernathy concluded one meeting with nine central points of the bus boycott, one of which included that “we have kept our struggle Christian and intend to keep

⁶⁰ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham. *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

⁶¹ Stanford University, “MIA Mass Meeting at Holt Street Baptist Church.” The Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute, 1955. Accessed Oct. 5, 2019, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/mia-mass-meeting-holt-street-baptist-church>.

⁶² Stanford University, “MIA Mass Meeting.”

it so.”⁶³ Two other points among the nine also alluded to prayer, pilgrimage, and appeals to God, which were carefully self-articulated characterizations labeled by the movement. In so doing, the leaders of the boycott took advantage of their faith and Christian traditions to raise the movement to the level of respectability necessary to attract sympathy and attention throughout the country.

Famous for her speech at the Democratic National Convention in 1964, Hamer also exhibited strategic use of rhetorical Christianity in appealing to white Americans and pushing a sense of shame and guilt. On the night in which she was beaten in the Mississippi jail, she admitted to “[hitting] them with the truth, and it hurts them,” when she said to the police officer, “do you people ever think or wonder how you’ll feel when the time comes you’ll have to meet God?”⁶⁴ Apart from her direct jabs at the morality of man, Hamer often included religious rhetoric and appeals in her speeches. Before a crowd in a mass meeting for voting rights, she reasoned that “one day America will crumble! Because God is not pleased. God is not pleased with all the murdering ... God is not pleased that the Negro children ... are suffering from malnutrition.”⁶⁵ Though she had only an elementary-level education, Hamer knew how to leverage Christian morality in her comments and appeals to the broader white population of America.

⁶³ Rustin, *Down the Line*, 61.

⁶⁴ “I’m Not Backing Off,” 2017.

⁶⁵ Fannie Lou Hamer. Audio Recording from the Moses Moon Collection in the African-American Culture Archives of Greenwood, Mississippi. The National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, 1963.

White Evangelicals

The analysis of religious involvement in the civil rights movement would not be complete, though, without including the involvement of white Protestants. Scholarly literature alludes that white churchgoers intentionally ignored the black struggle, or they adamantly and overtly opposed the advancement of African American civil rights. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., writes in evidence of this explanation in his *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, condemning the “appalling silence of the good people ... [and those who] have been more cautious than courageous and have remained silent behind the anesthetizing security of stained-glass windows.”⁶⁶ Samuel S. Hill Jr., an author of Southern religion, sides with Dr. King in his book *Southern Churches in Crisis*, explaining the intentional indifference of the church to the racial storm raging outside its walls, underlining the existing hypocrisy amongst Christian congregations.⁶⁷

On the other hand, Carolyn Renée Dupont argues that not only were they silent, but that the Southern white church as a social structure intentionally and adamantly opposed integration and an egalitarian society. The white church “regarded as patently absurd the notion that God frowned on their racial arrangements ... in their religious world, racial integration represented a heinous moral evil - they fought it as if against the devil himself.”⁶⁸ Dupont compounds her raving critique, stating that even white moderates were endangered and “seldom championed integration outright.”⁶⁹ While true, the statements and arguments of ignorance and opposition

⁶⁶ King, “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.”

⁶⁷ Samuel S. Hill, Jr. *Southern Churches in Crisis*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968).

⁶⁸ Carolyn Renée Dupont. *Mississippi Praying: Southern White Evangelicals and the Civil Rights Movement, 1945-1975*. (New York: NYU Press, 2015), 2.

⁶⁹ Dupont, *Mississippi Praying*, 3.

obscure the support that some white Protestants lent to the movement, sacrificing their livelihoods, families, and careers for the advancement of African Americans in the South.

While white Protestants of the South did in fact support and participate in the civil rights movement, this is not to argue that they were the majority, nor is it meant to idealize their contributions. Contrary to David L. Chappell's *A Stone of hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow*, radical religion and Christian doctrine did not overwhelmingly ignite compassionate morality, nor did it strike a nerve throughout the Southern congregations. He argues that the Christian morality of the civil rights movement was overpowering and more convincing than the religious appeals of the Christian Right, but this ignores the decades long rhetoric and appealing of the New Right, through to Reagan in 1980.⁷⁰ Joseph Crespino, in his book *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution*, examines this trend, explaining why 1964 presidential candidate Barry Goldwater won overwhelming with 85% of the vote in Mississippi, while President Lyndon B. Johnson won soundly on the national level. Christian Conservatives went in search of new political mechanisms, though they were still cloaked in the rhetoric of religion and states' rights - two campaign themes that arguably won Reagan the Oval Office in 1980. White Protestants in Mississippi - the deepest in Southern culture and Conservatism - sought a Christian nation that upheld white order, which they considered divinely ordained.⁷¹ It was therefore in this atmosphere that presidential candidate Reagan struck a chord, appealing to Christian morals within a states' rights doctrine.

⁷⁰ Joseph Crespino. *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution (Politics and Society in Modern America)*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

⁷¹ Crespino, *In Search of Another Country*.

Despite this overarching characterization of southern white churchgoers, a handful of this population still persisted in defying their racial order and assisting their black brothers and sisters. Progressive egalitarian involvement of white Protestants in the South was a complicated situation in which, though the minority, many individuals did share sympathy with the civil rights movement. However, given societal or public pressure, they were discouraged, frightened, or lacked the courage to outright support the movement. Nonetheless, a number of southern white Christians sacrificed their livelihood to work with African Americans in their struggle for freedom and equality.

In his book, *Born of Conviction: White Methodists and Mississippi's Closed Society*, author Joseph T. Reiff best defines the contributions of a select number of ministers in the south. Chronicling the writing, signing, distribution, and the retribution of the statement *Born of Conviction* in 1963, Reiff outlines how liberal white Protestants did break the silence - even in the Closed Society of Mississippi - speaking out against the injustices of racial discrimination and segregation. Importantly, though, Reiff also includes the “ostracism, persecution, threats, and some violence” that the 28 white ministers received for signing the publication.⁷² There was voiced praise and gratitude of the statement from both black and white churchgoers, however the white public “did perceive a dilemma and struggled with the guilt they felt at the multiple injustices of the system [but] they could not articulate it well and felt powerless to act.”⁷³ Despite this sentiment, though, 20 of the 28 ministers ultimately left Mississippi for direct or indirect reasons such as death threats or lack of employment opportunities. Within the South, white involvement in the civil rights movement was surely an act of martyrdom as congregations

⁷² Joseph T. Reiff. *Born of Conviction: White Methodists and Mississippi's Closed Society*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), xiv.

⁷³ Reiff, *Born of Conviction*, xv.

quickly turned against their ministers. Even members of the churches the 28 served at were involved in the Ku Klux Klan, and shortly after signing the statement, Elton Brown at Lonely Lane Church in Natchez found Klan pamphlets and propaganda distributed across the church lawn and in the chapel pews.⁷⁴ Ultimately, this history complicates and ambiguates the common histories of a homogenous south; ministers taking a stand against the silence negates indifference and intentional counteraction, yet their congregations' reactions show the complexity of the crisis.

The ministers wrote the statement in reaction to the riots that overtook the University of Ole Miss in September 1962, in which segregationists protested the enrollment of James Meredith, a black veteran of the military.⁷⁵ With hundreds injured and two dead in the wake of the riot, the statement sought to speak out in the midst of the silence of the Christian south. Outlining their motivation to write, the ministers include “confronted with the grave crises precipitated by racial discord within our state ... born of the deep conviction of our souls as to what is morally right ... we have a particular obligation to speak.”⁷⁶ The statement goes on to affirm four radical claims based on Christian, and specifically Methodist, doctrine:

(I) The Church is the instrument of God’s purpose ... It is ours only as stewards under His Lordship. Effective practice of this stewardship for the minister clearly requires freedom of the pulpit. (II) We affirm our faith in [that] “Our Lord Jesus Christ teaches that all men are brothers. He permits no discrimination because of race, color, or creed” ... “all men are brothers, and that man is of infinite worth as a child of God. (III) ... We are unalterably opposed to the closing of public schools on any level or to the diversion of tax funds to support of private sectarian schools. (IV) In these conflicting times, the issues of race and Communism are frequently confused ... We affirm an unflinching opposition to Communism.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Reiff, *Born of Conviction*.

⁷⁵ BBC, “1962: Mississippi race riots over first black student,” *On This Day: 1950-2005*, n.d., Accessed April 15, 2020, http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/october/1/newsid_2538000/2538169.stm.

⁷⁶ Jerry Furr et al. “Born of Conviction,” *The Mississippi Methodist Advocate*, (January 2, 1963), 2.

⁷⁷ Furr et al., “Born of Conviction.”

The ministers described further their intentions and motivations in the statement, but notably, they overtly and strongly included quotations from scripture, proclamations of the Methodist church, and appealed to the good will of the people, which shows an elaborate and intentional use of Christian rhetoric for the purpose of reaching a Christian audience. Furthermore, the ministers felt obligated to include a denouncement of Communism due to the strong connection between civil rights and the Soviet ideology.⁷⁸ further writing that man is committed to Jesus Christ, therefore is “in permanent opposition to communism. He cannot be a Christian and a communist.”⁷⁹ Included as the ultimate point, the 28 through the editing phase strategically considered how the letter would be received and the reactions that would ensue. In doing so, they demonstrate and follow the common thread of intentional and methodical strategy used by the black freedom struggle since its inception. Their statement was not a spur of the moment letter, rather it was a collaborative, authoritative, and complete explanation of their views that considered their atmosphere, audience, and history. Furthermore, the ministers demonstrated how their personal faith motivated them to break the silence of the white majority in the South, that it was “the deep conviction of *our* souls,” which deliberately refrains from a legalistic or congregational approach of persuasion.⁸⁰ Instead, it pushes their personal motivation, one so deep that it yearns from their souls.

The aftermath of the *Born of Conviction* statement further murks the narrative that the majority of Southern Protestantism was out of touch with their national congregations, homogeneously against African American egalitarianism. Dupont argues that congregational

⁷⁸ Jeff Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare: Segregation and Anti-Communism in the South, 1948-1968*. (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2003).

⁷⁹ Furr et al., “Born of Conviction.”

⁸⁰ Furr et al., “Born of Conviction.”

agreement regarding God's will of racial equality and against discrimination did not come until the 21st century in the modern church, but the happenings after the 1963 decree negate this notion.⁸¹ Ministers and churches throughout the South followed suit of the Mississippi Methodists, either releasing their own statement - notably with more signatures - or becoming directly involved in the movement such as minister Ed King at Tougaloo College of Mississippi, a historically black institution.⁸² Though these statements did not gain as much attention, nor were they as powerful as that of Dr. King in Birmingham, they nonetheless were released by white Southerners.

Histories such as that of Dupont furthermore ignore the radical contributions and changes that took place within church leadership and organizations that conflicted strongly with the congregations they represented. Bishop Edward J. Pendergrass, for example, was elected to the Mississippi Conference in 1964, serving through his retirement in 1972.⁸³ During his tenure, Bishop Pendergrass refused bribes from the far-right Citizens' Council and joined an ecumenical group to form the Committee of Concern, which raised money to rebuild black churches that had been burned down by racial violence.⁸⁴

Of the 28 ministers that signed the *Born of Conviction* statement, eight remained in Mississippi through their ministerial careers, and it was their work, "along with many other leaders, black and white, [that] played a profound role in transforming churches and communities toward a new Mississippi."⁸⁵ Reiff includes in his book that "the real heroes of that

⁸¹ Dupont, *Mississippi Praying*.

⁸² "Ed King." *Mississippi Encyclopedia*, Mississippi Humanities Council, n.d. Accessed Oct. 25, 2019, <https://mississippiencyclopedia.org/entries/ed-king/>.

⁸³ Millsaps College, "Pendergrass Papers." J.B. Cain Archives of Mississippi Methodism, n.d. Accessed Oct. 25, 2019, http://www.millsaps.edu/library/archives/resources/library_cain_pendergrass.pdf.

⁸⁴ Reiff, *Born of Conviction*.

⁸⁵ Reiff, *Born of Conviction*, xviii.

story are not the ones of us who left ... but the ones who stayed. They're the real heroes," however *Born of Conviction* dedicates only one chapter to these eight, two or four pages for each minister⁸⁶. Furthermore, in his promotional blog post prior to the release of the book, he adds only one sentence explaining that eight stayed in the Mississippi Conference.⁸⁷ Their counter-cultural contributions, though, deserve to be highlighted. Through their continued activism in their respective churches, the eight continued to significantly impact their local communities.

Upon the signing and release of *Born of Conviction*, Nathan Andrew Dickson was the pastor of Columbia First Church, and the response from his congregation was not severe like others. Two years after signing, Dickson explained his reasons for staying, citing "this is home. Too much in debt to get away from lending agencies who know me. I have 'run' from some things in life but chose not to run from this one; I like a fight now and then."⁸⁸ He saw too many reasons to stay and not enough to leave. He further saw purpose in remaining in Mississippi following the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act; he wanted to stay to help negotiate, mitigate, and implement changes of the legislation.

Joining a biracial advocacy group in 1965, Dickson worked to advise the mayor of Columbia, E.D. "Buddy" McLean Jr. This group came to be known as "The Six" - though one minister withdrew early on - and included white Presbyterian minister William G. McAtee and

⁸⁶ Reiff, *Born of Conviction*, 198.

⁸⁷ Joseph T. Reiff. "Did I do what I should have done?: white clergy in 1960s Mississippi." OUP Blog, Oxford University Press, Nov. 16, 2015. Accessed Oct. 25, 2019, <https://blog.oup.com/2015/11/white-clergy-1960s-mississippi/>.

⁸⁸ Reiff, *Born of Conviction*, 200.

three black preachers: A.G. Payton of Owen Chapel Baptist Church, L.Z. Blankinship of Friendship Missionary Baptist Church, and I.C. Pittman of Mississippi Rural Center.⁸⁹

It was at this time that the City School Board still struggled to integrate the public-school system, citing financial and logistical concerns. In response, Dickson urged local businessmen to release a statement urging the town to integrate the school systems. Strategically, he wrote to religious leaders, all Methodist or Presbyterian with the exception of two Baptists.⁹⁰ The response was positive and a statement in the paper was released, urging the City School Board to follow federal law.⁹¹ An integration plan was approved one month later.

Later that year, the Methodist minister helped gather together two citizens' groups - one white and one black - to elect 12 representatives each to serve on a biracial council called the Community Relations Committee. Through the committee and in his advisory role to the mayor, Dickson continued to act as a liaison between the local SNCC and MFDP chapters.

James Sydney Conner signed the *Born of Conviction* statement while serving as minister at Brandon Methodist Church. His signing came as a surprise to many, given his strong commitment to rule, order, and the institutional church, however Conner identified as a Personalistic Idealist, which propelled him to act and trumped his regard for tradition.⁹² Personalistic Idealism insists that "personhood is the fundamental notion ... [and] carries with it an inviolable dignity that merits unconditional respect."⁹³ Within the Christian religion, therefore, Conner's Personalistic Idealism interpreted that "human beings are created in God's

⁸⁹ McAtee. "Letter from Mississippi – September 2, 1965." Edited by Dick Atlee. Sept. 4, 2019. Accessed Nov. 1, 2019, https://dickatlee.com/issues/mississippi/mississippi_650902_mcatee.html#six.

⁹⁰ McAtee, "Letter from Mississippi."

⁹¹ Dickson and McAtee. "Letter from Mississippi to Selected Community Members." Edited by Dick Atlee. Sept. 23, 2013. Accessed Nov. 1, 2019, https://dickatlee.com/issues/mississippi/for_your_consideration.html.

⁹² Reiff, *Born of Conviction*.

⁹³ Stanford University, "Personalism." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Published November 12, 2009; Revised May 11, 2018. Accessed Nov. 1, 2019, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/personalism/#WhaPer>.

image is to make a moral statement: we know good from evil because we are created *imago Dei*. Therefore, all human beings are equal, and we are obliged to treat everyone as created in God's image."⁹⁴

Following the statement's release, Conner eventually moved from Brandon church to Hawkins Methodist Church, while continuing his positions as vice-president and member of the Executive Board of the Mississippi Council on Human Relations (MCHP), a bi-racial advisory committee to the local government.⁹⁵ He served for over a year without controversy, only until the MCHR began to receive bad press regarding the Church Visit Campaign (CVC). Led by Tougaloo Chaplain Ed King in 1964 Jackson, the CVC attempted to desegregate white conservative and moderate churches.⁹⁶

Though his ministerial career would last forty years, *Born of Conviction* followed him from church to church. Serving no more than five years at a church, Conner moved from Hawkins to Broad Street Church in Hattiesburg, then to Grace Church in Natchez, and ultimately to Epworth Church in South Jackson. However, his family found out that a congregant from Brandon Church would follow Conner to each church, attempting to start rumors so that the congregation would turn against the minister, though this never came to fruition.⁹⁷

Through his career, Conner exhibited courage to go against the majority, put his neck on the line, and even sacrifice the well-being of his family who had to move with him from city to

⁹⁴ Reiff, *Born of Conviction*, 208.

⁹⁵ "Mississippi Council on Human Relations Records." The American Folklife Center, the Library of Congress, n.d. Accessed Nov. 1, 2019, https://www.loc.gov/folklife/civilrights/survey/view_collection.php?coll_id=2932.

⁹⁶ Catherin Lawson. "The Most Segregated Hour in America: Protesting Segregation in Church," in *Semantic Scholar*, 2007. Accessed Nov. 3, 2019, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/ae47/881cfa56ca613b7448238c0a26b5ab2a5382.pdf>.

⁹⁷ Reiff, *Born of Conviction*.

city. Working with the MCHR, he displayed true faithful motivation to advocate reconciliation between races and the advancement of African Americans.

Minister Elton Brown of Lonely Lane Church in Natchez signed the statement and assumed that it was not radical and that there would not be swift protest. Understanding the Methodist doctrine, Brown saw the statement as a re-centering of their faithful proclamation, not as a radical, counter-cultural declaration. The church resided in Morgantown, Mississippi, which was known by the local black community as “Klux’s Den,” and the immediate consequence of Brown’s signing of *Born of Conviction* only verified this. A few days following the statement, Klan leaflets were found distributed through the lawn and chapel of the church.⁹⁸

The next coming Sunday, Brown disregarded his prepared sermon to explain his intention in signing the statement and what it meant for his congregation. Following that service, one man approached him with thanks, and explained how he had become tired of racism and hypocrisy in the church.⁹⁹ Riding on this positive support, Brown petitioned the church’s advisory board to publish an open policy on Sunday’s, allowing all races to attend. The debate ended in hostility and nearly violently, however the petition passed. Ultimately, though, the congregation lost more than 30 members who joined other churches or started their own congregation and no African Americans came to attend in the immediate aftermath. In this story, minister Brown exhibited a strong sense of personal conviction and faith to speak out within “Klux’s Den.” In his explanatory sermon the following Sunday, he included that he had “come to feel from studying the Bible and my own convictions and reverence for God that [all the races] are equal,” the

⁹⁸ Jack E. Davis. *Race Against Time: Culture and Separation in Natchez since 1940*. (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2004).

⁹⁹ Davis, *Race Against Time*, 199.

church was a “healing agent” for a society in “turmoil,” and the Methodist church had grossly misrepresented God’s will.”¹⁰⁰

Rod Entrekin was one of the few signers that received little to no backlash nor controversy from his local congregation. In fact, he was re-elected in 1963 to continue serving at Wesson Church. Shortly after, he was offered a promotion to Woodville Church in October of 1963 from the conference bishop but denied the position due to racial prejudice in the church. Though his church did not offer him difficulty, he had his fair share of run-ins with the local chapter of the Ku Klux Klan such as vehicular sabotage by putting syrup in his truck engine or a drive by shooting carried out by members of the Klan while his wife and two daughters were at home. In 1964, Entrekin applied for, was offered, and accepted the position of chaplain at the Mississippi State Hospital in Whitfield, which came at an opportune time after the passage of the Civil Rights Act and the consequential integration of the facility’s some 4,000 patients. Working with one black and the other white chaplain, Entrekin served within the psychiatric wing of the hospital, serving patients, both black and white, and their families.

In explaining his motivation for racial equality, signing the statement, and working the next two decades as an interracial hospital chaplain, Entreken explained that “being involved in social issues was not an act of courage on my part, but a matter of conviction.”¹⁰¹ In other words, it was his personal faith that outweighed his fear of societal retribution or harm towards himself and his family. His faith and conviction of God’s will urged and encouraged him to advocate and serve both white and black Americans.

¹⁰⁰ Davis, *Race Against Time*, 199.

¹⁰¹ Reiff, *Born of Conviction*, 218.

The same sense of safety and sanctuary evidently could not be found in the white church in comparison to the black church. This stark distinction is blatantly obvious in the Closed Society of Mississippi, how outspoken activists were intimidated to silence or those that spoke out acted as martyrs. Such as in the story of minister Elton Brown, a number of local church members in the South held dual membership with the Ku Klux Klan. In Morgantown, a region known as the Klux's Den, civil rights activists were not welcome at any establishment, let alone a church.

Considering faith and their religion as motivation for involvement in the civil rights movement and radical protests, white southern Christians exemplified equal dedication to their faith in reason for speaking against the majority. As minister Rod Entrekin stated, it was his strong religious conviction that motivated him to sign the *Born of Conviction* statement, risking his career, life, and well-being of his family. In their belief that all races are human, therefore created by God, and then deserving of dignity and respect, white Christians showed that their progressivism and necessity to sacrifice for African American egalitarianism was caused by their religious conviction

Contrary to the black movement, white activists seemed to be less strategic and intentional in their activism and plans. While indeed their protests were meticulously planned, initial activism usually was spurred off the cuff. Reverend Entrekin would later say in life that he often stumbled into the situations of civil disobedience, against the status-quo. Yes, he was religiously motivated, but often just spoke his mind and was confident in his beliefs, that he did not intentionally use his faith as a political tool. Entrekin and others were ministers that happened into politics, whereas Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., a Baptist preacher, saw political activism and the political sphere as more integral, more necessary. Dr. King was

certainly a pastor, but as an African American, he out of necessity had to strategically use his religious faith to craft appeals to the greater public. White ministers, on the other hand, spoke at the pulpit with privilege. They did not have to continually justify their Biblically based beliefs and were understood as Christian men, whereas Dr. King intentionally had to market and brand himself as a Christian preacher - as evidenced in the creation and subsequent naming of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Conclusion

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Christianity played an integral role in the Civil Rights Movement. Functionally, the church was used to congregate mass meetings in order to disseminate information, hold votes, educate the masses, and organize both famous nation-wide protests and town-based, grassroots campaigns. In many circumstances of a segregated society, the only space that African Americans could safely organize, socialize, and plan civil rights protests was the church. Additionally, the congregation played a vital role in financial contributions that would be donated to fuel protests and movements across the United States. One's faith was also used on a personal scale to prolong non-violent civil disobedience, cope with racial retribution, and increase awareness of self-worth and dignity. Many activists recall that their faith contributed to their motivation to civilly disobey unjust laws of the land, since they realized their divinely endowed rights as human beings. Lastly, religion followed other trends in the movement as it was strategically employed to increase respectability and to appeal to the masses. At the time, most Americans either blatantly disagreed to the Movement or were apathetic to the cause, however by intricately using religious rhetoric and appeals, leaders and

other activists were able to attract not only sympathy but bi-racial involvement in the Black Freedom Struggle. Through this period, the Right did not hold a monopoly on the political and personal use of religion in American society and government. By analyzing and understanding religion and faith during the Civil Rights Movement, it is evident that activists on the Left, the progressive side of the debate, also equipped their personal faith to inform their political viewpoints and fuel their protest throughout the Movement.

Chapter 2

Chicano Movement

Introduction

Joining together to denounce their lack of pay, poor working conditions, and frequent abuse from their employers, the National Farm Workers Association and a group of Filipino workers started a protest in the summer of 1965, however they did not know it would have to endure for multiple years. While negotiations between the labor union and farm owners took place, the picketing, town halls, 300-mile march, and local boycotts did not garner any concessions.¹⁰² In response, unrest grew amongst the activists with calls of violence emerging. In order to combat this unrest, César Chávez, the figure head of the movement, began a fast in 1968 that lasted 25 days, during which he only took Communion bread and wine and drank water between masses. In explaining how he persevered through the fast, Chávez noted that he could not “base my will to struggle on cold economics or on some political doctrine. I don’t think there would be enough to sustain me,” but rather his Christian faith gave him the personal strength.¹⁰³

Chávez in this scenario exemplifies the strong religiosity of many Chicano activists at the time, using their faith and religion as motivation to persevere through oppression and maintain a level of non-violence in their protests. Furthermore, mass and church-related meetings divulged information and brought together activists from across the southwest. Distinct from the civil rights movement, however, the Chicano movement embraced its population’s historical

¹⁰² Kim Inga, “Today in History: Cesar Chavez began his 25-day water-only fast in Delano, Calif. On Feb. 15, 1968,” *United Farm Workers*, March 7, 2017. Accessed Feb. 12, 2020, <https://ufw.org/today-history-cesar-chavez-began-25-day-water-fast-delano-calif-feb-11-1968/>.

¹⁰³ César Chávez. *An Autobiography of La Causa*. Edited by Jacques E. Levy. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

indigenous roots in junction with their identity as immigrants to the United States. Equipping religion rhetorically, ideologically, and functionally, this social-political protest swept through the southwestern United States, motivating those of Mexican American descent to gather together advocating for equal rights and protections and ultimately radicalizing them.

Much like the African American population, the Chicano nation is one of the most historically oppressed groups in the United States, however it is one of the smallest minority groups. Because of this, the history of the people, their culture and how they have lived in the United States have scantily been covered by modern historians. This is especially true for the Chicano Movement. This applied especially to migrant labor workers, encouraging them to unionize and demand better working conditions, while also extending to general demands to the government for basic human rights and adequate protection from discrimination.

Most importantly, the Chicano Movement complicates the Black-White history of racial civil rights and also introduced the aspect of language rights to the political scene.¹⁰⁴ Though much moved in terms of progress by the African American movement in the late 1960s, the Mexican American population suffered as it fell through the cracks of a historical Black-White racial binary. Their struggle and efforts to achieve labor and civil protections moved the notion of civil rights from a matter of North versus South or rural versus urban and expanded it to a western geographic and immigrant demographic.

Despite the histories written on the movement, the great majority do not adequately acknowledge the role of faith and religion within its members, organizations, and communities.¹⁰⁵ It is therefore imperative to understand that by secularizing, rather stripping

¹⁰⁴ Marc Simon Rodriguez, *Rethinking the Chicano Movement*, (New York: Routledge Press, 2015).

¹⁰⁵ Rodriguez, *Rethinking*; Lauren Araiza, *To March for Others: the Black Freedom Struggle and the United Farm Workers*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); Thomas G. Paterson, *Major*

religion from the Chicano Movement, scholars ignore the functional contributions of the church and fail to capture the important personal religious motivation of the Latino community. Furthermore, this leads to misinterpretations of religious symbols and rituals, resulting in underrepresenting their significance and how they were received by the Mexican American community. Through rhetoric, activism, and ritualistic congregation, the Chicano movement adds evidence to the fact that over 90% of the Latino population identified as Catholic through the 1960s.¹⁰⁶

Liberation and Faith

In order to understand the religious motivation of the Chicano population to fight for their dignity against the labor and societal oppression imposed upon them by large agricultural companies in the 1960s, it is important to comprehend Latino liberation theology. In such, the region's social, political, and economic history construct the basis of the Latino theology of liberation. Therefore, it is imperative to analyze the long history of oppression that the peoples of Latin America has suffered in order to then focus the lens of this argument in the social situation of the Chicano population. This historical thread does not solely being with Iberian conquest and the arrival of *Peninsulares* in 1492 and onward, since in fact there is a long history of inter-indigenous war, conquest, and savagery, however within the context of Christian theology and its subsequent formation, the history begins in colonial America.

Problems in American History: Volume II, Since 1865. Edited by Elizabeth Cobbs and Edward J. Blum, fourth edition, (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2017).

¹⁰⁶ Juan Carlos Donoso, "On religion, Mexicans are more Catholic and often more traditional than Mexican Americans," Pew Research Center, Dec. 8, 2014. Accessed Dec. 8, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/12/08/>.

Following their arrival, Spanish colonists swiftly and effectively conquered areas through what is now the modern United States, Central America, and to the Southern-most extents of the continent. In doing so, the native populations were brought to “ecclesiastical dependence, along with cultural, economic, and political dependence.”¹⁰⁷ They imposed a class system, a semi-feudal pyramid that placed Iberian natives as rulers and others as subordinates. When the explorers of the Castilian Crown arrived and conquered, they imposed their European norms, political systems, and the Roman Catholic religious structure, but in such a manner that failed to convert indigenous populations to New Testament Christianity; rather it forced America to practice Catholicism.¹⁰⁸ This did not replace the already established traditions and religions of the natives, however, as Christian symbols, saints, and rituals mixed with the indigenous gods, allowing the natives, an already religious group, to worship their previous gods in private.¹⁰⁹

Several centuries after the arrival of Peninsular colonists, a call for independence was led by Criollos, those of Spanish descendants but born in the New World, including members of the religious community, such as Mexico’s José María Morelos or priest Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla.¹¹⁰ While it is true that liberal ideas flooded Latin America from the United States and the rest of Europe, these values and beliefs failed to mobilize large amounts of people from the ground up. Instead, they were motivated by the semi-privileged of society and only resulted in a transfer of leadership, but not a re-structuring of the political and economic systems.¹¹¹ It is the remnants of the Spanish conquest and Criollos assumption of rule that has relegated the

¹⁰⁷ Emilio A. Núñez, *Liberation Theology*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985).

¹⁰⁸ Kevin Chau, “Spanish Conquest of the Americas as a long-term process,” Feb. 2, 2018. Accessed Dec. 7, 2019, <https://medium.com/@kevinshau/spanish-conquest-of-the-americas-as-a-long-term-process-8a0ae136e7b>.

¹⁰⁹ Christopher Jocks and Lawrence E. Sullivan, “Native American religions,” n.d. Accessed Jan. 3, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Native-American-religion>.

¹¹⁰ Núñez, *Liberation Theology*.

¹¹¹ Núñez, *Liberation Theology*.

population of America Third World status, with only a few exceptions, although through the history of dictators, many experts believe their regimes manipulated the statistics.¹¹²

Within this context of oppression and subordination, liberation theology was born amongst the religious scholars and theologians of Latin America. On the large scale, “liberation theologians conclude that underdevelopment is a product of the economic dependence of poor countries on rich countries ... [Developed countries] continue to be colonialist in the sense that they exploit underdeveloped countries, so that they obtain cheap raw materials and labor and have markets where they are able to set the price of their products.”¹¹³

These contexts and ideologies made their way into the United States as immigration from the Americas gained steam in the early 20th century, usurping Europe as the region with the most movement into the United States.¹¹⁴ Considering that the United States currently has one of the largest Spanish-speaking populations in the world, second only to Mexico, Latino populations substantially immigrated to the country over the past 100 years.¹¹⁵ Moreover, Spain historically claimed regions in the Americas that extended into the United States in areas such as California, Texas, and Arizona. In New Mexico, for example, the prevalence of Hispanic America manifested itself in the school system as 70 percent state’s schools were taught in Spanish during the latter half of the 19th century.¹¹⁶ Therefore, the historic fabric of Chicano identity and ideology within the United States holds claim to associate with and be informed by liberation theology. Within the 20th century, however, instead of forming opposition to the

¹¹² Núñez, *Liberation Theology*.

¹¹³ Núñez, *Liberation Theology*.

¹¹⁴ Silvina Montrul. “El español en los Estados Unidos,” in *El bilingüismo en el mundo hispanohablante*. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2013).

¹¹⁵ Stephen Burgen, “US now has more Spanish speakers than Spain – only Mexico has more,” US News, *The Guardian*, June 29, 2015. Accessed April 15, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/jun/29/us-second-biggest-spanish-speaking-country>.

¹¹⁶ Montrul, *El bilingüismo en el mundo hispanohablante*.

oppression of a European colonizer, the Chicano population took on CEOs and politicians within the arena of American agribusiness.

Recharacterizing César Chávez, the Saint of the Chicano Movement

César Chávez was born in the Spring of 1927 in the scorching sun of the Arizona desert to Mexican-born immigrants who had a total six children total. Shortly after his early childhood, his family uprooted and moved to California in search of farm laboring work. He dropped out of school after the seventh grade so that his mother would not have to work and his family could be provided for.¹¹⁷ Representing the typical multi-generational Hispanic family, Chávez's grandparents dwelt with his family, a relationship that through his childhood would prove valuable to his beliefs and morals. At home, his mother and grandmother pursued holy lives within the Catholic church, a tradition that César would inherit. It was also during this time that he would become aware of the injustice brought upon the Chicano laborers across the United States, leading him to a life of activism for the advancement of civil and labor rights.

In his endeavors, he sought help from men and women alike, as well as from Catholic and Protestant churches in order to mobilize and energize workers in protests. Following centuries of farmworker oppression and the more recent iniquities caused the Bracero Program of the 1950s, Chávez with Dolores Huerta founded the United Farm Workers Union (UFW) in 1962.¹¹⁸ The union then exponentially increased in chapters and became an overwhelming force

¹¹⁷ Barry Hudock, "Cesar's Choice: How America's farm workers got organized," *America: The Jesuit Review* vol. 207, no. 5, (2012), <https://www.americanmagazine.org/issue/5149/article/cesars-choice>.

¹¹⁸ United Farm Workers, "The Rise of the UFW," UFW History, n.d. Accessed Oct. 22, 2019, <https://ufw.org/research/history/ufw-history/>.

in the fight for Chicano rights.¹¹⁹ By employing peaceful protests such as strikes and walkouts, organized at the grassroots level, Chávez, Huerta, and the movement led to broad labor, civil, and educational reform across the country, but most notably in California and Florida.¹²⁰

Through his activism, it was evident that Chávez's Catholic faith was backbone of his philosophy and actions, such that it "was profoundly Christ-centered, in a way that saw Jesus as both the motivation for the work and present in the suffering he sought to relieve."¹²¹

Growing up in a Catholic household centered on the teachings of Christ, Chávez was significantly influenced by his maternal heritage. He would later make her faith his own as he grew older and became under the guidance and Catholic social teaching of Father Donald McDonald, that is the value of working in unison towards the common good.¹²² The late labor leader explained his determination through the movement, saying "I think Jesus really taught us to go and do something. We look at his sermons, and it's very plain what he wants us to do: clothe the naked, feed the hungry, and give water to the thirsty. It's very simple stuff."¹²³ The Catholic Church helped the labor movement on a practical level by regularly holding masses but also providing funding, nourishment, and housing for the labor leaders, activists, workers, and families engaged in the labor war.¹²⁴ Chávez was a man that frequently appealed to Christ and the Christian lifestyle. For instance, he appeals to this sentiment in a speech regarding public action:

Jesus' life and words are a challenge at the same time that they are Good News. They are a challenge to those of use who are poor and oppressed. By His life, He is

¹¹⁹ Luis León, "The Political Spirituality of Cesar Chavez: Crossing Religion Borders," *Fides et historia* vol. 49, no. 2, (2014), 81-83.

¹²⁰ Hudock, "Cesar's Choice."

¹²¹ Hudock, "Cesar's Choice."

¹²² Brendan Hill, *The Ongoing Renewal of Catholicism*. (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2008).

¹²³ Hill, *The Ongoing Renewal of Catholicism*, 278.

¹²⁴ Arturo Santamaría Gómez, "El movimiento de los inmigrantes indocumentados en Estados Unidos," *Política y cultura* vol. 27, (Spring 2007), 99-120.

calling us to give ourselves to others, to sacrifice for those who suffer, to share our lives with our brothers and sisters who are also oppressed. He is calling us to “hunger and thirst after justice” in the same way that we hunger and thirst after food and water: that is, by putting our yearning into practice.¹²⁵

Chávez knew suffering and pain. Known for fasting, which will be discussed later, he equipped himself with a divine steadfastness to capitalize on the moral appeals of martyrdom. Furthermore, his convictions led him to a life of service, fighting for the rights of others above his own, so much so that he considered the sacrifice of the crucifixion of Christ as the pinnacle of advocacy. This framework should be taken into account when considering how Chávez endured near-death suffering, often self-imposed.

Religion in the Movement

Much like their ancestors fought together within their pueblos to maintain land boundaries and rights from Spanish rule, Chicano farm hands banded together through their common Catholic identity to unionize and fight against the oppression of their employers.¹²⁶ They found dignity in their faith of the Christian traditions of divine creation and predestined salvation and used Jesus’ ministry and death as an example of political action of liberation through suffering and service. United by faith, activists exemplified that amongst Christians motivation to participate in the liberation of their people and the oppressed of society comes from “the conviction of the radical incompatibility of evangelical demands with an unjust and

¹²⁵ United Farm Workers, “Education of the Heart.”

¹²⁶ Emilio Kourí, “The Practices of Communal Landholding: Indian Pueblo Property Relations in Colonial Mexico,” in *Beyond Alterity: Destabilizing the Indigenous Other in Mexico*. Edited by Paula López Caballero and Ariadna Acevedo-Rodrigo, (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2018)

alienating society. They feel keenly that they cannot claim to be Christians without a commitment to liberation.”¹²⁷

In California, Catholic Churches echoed with this sentiment, endorsing the Delano Grape Strike in 1968. Two archbishops and seven bishops signed a declaration, stating “there will be no peace in the fields until we recognize the contradiction between this inherent dignity and the actual poor living conditions existing for many of these farm worker families.”¹²⁸ Much like the Catholic Church in California, other churches and citizens in various parts of the nation grew sympathetic to the cause, viewing the crimes of violence against nonviolence, wealthy against poor, as truly atrocious.¹²⁹

Latino liberation theology, therefore, views the oppression and injustices of society as a collective sin of the oppressor, an action of sin that if not counteracted, implies guilt with those ignorant to the cause. Counteracting the injustices imposed by a system that benefits those with financial and political power involves Chicano Christians responding, “radically and militantly with those - the people and the social class - who bear the brunt of oppression.”¹³⁰ Moreover, Latino liberation theology argued that the gospel, that is to say the story of Christ, outlawed oppression and advocated for the minority. The life of Christ, accordingly, served as an example to those in suffering that his words were directed to the Chicano population. This shared belief amongst the Chicano population, then explains the surging fame and attention that Chávez received for his activism and ministry. Through his sacrifices and public speeches, activists and

¹²⁷ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 145.

¹²⁸ “Catholic Bishops Endorse Grape Strike,” *El Malcriado* vol. 11, no. 9, (July 1, 1968), 11.

¹²⁹ Kathleen Hamm, “Letters to the Editor,” *El Malcriado* vol. 3, no. 66, (Aug. 16, 1967). In this letter, Miss Hamm attributes the actions of the wealthy to those of the biblical Cain, “who lost the right to peace with nature and his fellow man. Part of the tragedy of the wealthy grower is he doesn’t realize how poor in spirit he is.”

¹³⁰ Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 146.

admirers made symbolic pilgrimages to visit the labor leader, identifying him with the words of Christ in the gospel according to John: “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men [sic] to myself.”¹³¹

Chávez still found suffering necessary within the tactics of nonviolence, since time and mass in numbers were necessary for change.¹³² In his autobiography, Chávez writes that “some great nonviolent successes have been achieved in history. Moses is about the best example, and the first one. Christ is also a beautiful example, as is the way the Christians overcame tyranny. They needed 300 years, but they did it.”¹³³ On a larger scale, many within the Chicano population would agree with Chávez, that the cross, or suffering, of Christ could be equated to the many crosses that humanity suffers, therefore their theology and faith emphasized that “suffering is a way of being God, that God was at the cross and suffered there the death of the Son.”¹³⁴ Within this frame of thought, Chávez, like many others, was motivated to suffer for the cause.

The labor leader later wrote that “For me the base [of struggle] must be faith ... For me, Christianity happens to be a natural source of faith.”¹³⁵ This faith is ultimately what carried Chávez through his 25-day fast, during which he only consumed water, but was sustained by prayer, Communion of bread and wine, and mass. Regarding the fast, he wrote that he could feel “leg pains and back pains. I think that because of the lack of calcium, I began to draw calcium from my bones. The pains in my joints were horrible.”¹³⁶ He accredited his will to persevere to

¹³¹ Juan Luis Segundo, *Masas y minorías en la dialéctica divina de la liberación*, (Torrance, CA: La Aurora Publishing, Inc., 1973), 10.

¹³² Max Heirich, “The Use of Time in the Study of Social Change,” *American Sociological Review* vol. 29, no. 3, (June 1964), 386-397.

¹³³ Chávez, *An Autobiography of La Causa*.

¹³⁴ Jon Sobrino, *Jesus in Latin America*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Pub., 2004), 184, 192, 196.

¹³⁵ Chávez, *An Autobiography of La Causa*, 27.

¹³⁶ Chávez, *An Autobiography of La Causa*, 276.

the countless offerings brought to him and the faith of the union workers and activists around him. “A fast is first and foremost personal. It is a fast for the purification of my own body, mind, and soul. The fast is also a heartfelt prayer for purification,” he said, demonstrating the religious motivation at the base of the fast.¹³⁷ These offerings included crucifixes, many depictions of Christ, the Virgin of Guadalupe, and statues of St. Martín de Porres, the black saint from Peru who happens to be the most famous in Latin America. Throughout this ordeal, Chávez demanded to still attend mass and receive communion daily, to which he admitted “once we started with the religious service, the fast affected our members in a very religious way.”¹³⁸ Through his suffering, members of the United Farm Workers increased in advocacy, activism, and overall radicalism. This radical evolution addresses the strong connection and relation to the suffering of Christ that Latino Christians feel. In his actions, Chávez manifested the sufferings of Christ into a visible and tangible manner, which fueled and motivated his Chicano followers because of the sense of unjust suffering and the martyrdom of Christ.

Breaking his fast on March 10, 1968, from the bed of a pickup truck he addressed a massive congregation of over 10,000 attendees at a mass.¹³⁹ Though he was too exhausted and weak from fasting to speak on his own behalf, he wrote a statement that was read in both English and Spanish, which said “it is how we use our lives that determines what kind of men we are. It is my deepest belief that only by giving our lives do we find life ... I am convinced that the truest act of courage, the strongest act of manliness is to sacrifice ourselves for others ... To be a man is to suffer for others.”¹⁴⁰ In declaring so, Chávez alluded to the Book of Matthew in which

¹³⁷ “The Story of Cesar Chavez,” *United Farm Workers*, n.d. Accessed Jan. 14, 2020, <https://ufw.org/research/history/story-cesar-chavez/>.

¹³⁸ Chávez, *An Autobiography of La Causa*, 275.

¹³⁹ “10,000 Mass in Gran Fiesta,” *El Malcriado* vol. 11, no. 2, (March 15, 1968), 2.

¹⁴⁰ Chávez, *An Autobiography of La Causa*, 286.

Christ says, “for whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.”¹⁴¹ Knowing that the crowd would understand and relate to, Chávez in this speech not only displayed his personal faith and Biblical knowledge, but also that of the congregation which received the message warmly.

A large potluck fiesta was held after the service in which families and union activists from across the country dined, communed, and interacted with one another. Speaking about this occasion and others like it, one member explained, “I am not religious at all, but I would go to those masses at the Forty Acres every night. No matter what their religious background, anyone interested in farm workers, or with any sense about people, could see that something was going on that was changing a lot of people.”¹⁴² It is therefore evident that even when large numbers congregated for religious purposes during the activism of the United Farm Workers, they still served a functional purpose to the movement, especially to those who were not religious. This phenomenon extended to other areas of the Chicano Movement, such as La Plaza Vieja, New Mexico. Tina Pérez, a resident in the town, recalled that “we always participated in San Felipe [de Neri Catholic Church] even though our family was not Catholic. We went to church functions, always ... We participated fully in the procession, in the dances, in the singing, and our school [Harwood Methodist], quite often, was part of the entertainment.”¹⁴³ Much like the gentlemen attending a UFW mass, Pérez highlights the cultural importance of the church to Chicano culture. Through a history of turmoil, migration, and loss of ethnic identity, the church was a stable pillar in society.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Matthew 16:25 (NIV).

¹⁴² Chávez, *An Autobiography of La Causa*, 283.

¹⁴³ Erlinda Gonzales-Berry and David R. Maciel, *Contested Homeland: A Chicano History of New Mexico*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), 245.

¹⁴⁴ Gonzales-Berry and Maciel, *Contested Homeland*, 244.

Mass, such as was the case for the end of Chávez's fast, was used to motivate, energize, and re-radicalize the people of the movement, whether religious or not. By bringing everyone together under a common purpose and bringing divine inspiration and intervention into the grassroots movement, the Chicano activists were more willing to sacrifice and serve the common good of the farm laborers and union. Similar to the movement and the UFW Forty Acres Sanctuary, it was common for Chicano villages and towns throughout the Southwestern United States to have a Catholic Church in the center of town, when all could attend and commune.¹⁴⁵

The religiosity in the foundation of the Chicano movement was not only evident in the rhetoric or actions, but also through the rituals and functional uses of facilities. In 1966, the United Farm Workers received a land grant in Delano, California, which would become its headquarters that summer.¹⁴⁶ During the dedication ceremony of the laying of the foundation of construction for the first building on the property, various religious ceremonies were held. The UFW publication, *El Malcriado*, covered this event, however interestingly included more religious details in their Spanish coverage as compared to their English coverage. Printed side by side, the two languages covered both the blessings offered by Reverend Jim Drake and Father William Lewers and the musical celebration that followed. Crucially though, the Spanish coverage included "más temprano en la mañana el Padre William Lewers celebró la misa allí" (Earlier that morning, father Williams Lewers held a mass there).¹⁴⁷ This case, like many others, exemplifies the understood necessity, whether deliberate or subconsciously, to appeal to the religious needs and interests of the Chicano population. The editors of *El Malcriado* found it

¹⁴⁵ Nostrand, *The Hispano Homeland*.

¹⁴⁶ "The Forty Acres Delano, CA," *National Park Service*, n.d. Accessed Feb. 2, 2020, https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/american_latino_heritage/The_Forty_Acres.html.

¹⁴⁷ "Se Pone la Primera Piedra en los 40 Acres/Cornerstone Laid at 40 Acres," *El Malcriado* no. 66, (August 16, 1967), 8.

obligatory to address more religious events in their Spanish coverage because they felt and knew that their Hispanic audience would prefer such information. On the other hand, the English coverage, intended for white sympathizers to the movement, does not imply a need of religious persuasion nor motivation to the Anglo-Saxon population of the United States.

The newspaper coverage of laying the foundation to the Forty Acres sanctuary further carries this religious notion in the photos and captions that accompany the stories. In these photos, priests and pastors are shown congregating around the construction. Importantly, though, the captions of these photos emphasize and highlight the laying of the cornerstone and what items are placed inside of it. Within the Christian context, this is significant, as it alludes to passages such as in the book of Ephesians, in which Christ is described as “the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”¹⁴⁸ Within such cornerstone, the religious ceremony ended by placing a Constitution of the National Farm Workers Association, the first copy of *El Malcriado*, the *Plan of Delano* by Luis Valdez, the Schenley Contract, copies of “Basta” and “Huelga,” a UFWOC flag, the “Viva la Causa” record, the AWOC charter, various strike buttons, a copy of “Don Sotoco,” and a statement of purpose from the NFWA.¹⁴⁹ Continuing in the frame of the Christian point-of-view, this ceremony, through the focus of the cornerstone, was religiously significant because it brought Christ into its foundation, therefore equating the items placed within the cornerstone as relatively holy and sacred within their cause. This evidences the strong belief of the members of the UFW that their cause was just and divinely inspired. By placing materials of the movement within the

¹⁴⁸ Ephesians 2:19-22 (KJV)

¹⁴⁹ “Primera Piedra/Cornerstone,” *El Malcriado*.

cornerstone, Chávez, the priests, pastors, and others in attendance contextually defined the movement as that which brings and holds everyone together.

Across the nation, church activism was ignited through the influence and example set by the United Farm Workers and by Chávez. One example started by college students in downtown Los Angeles. *Católicos Por La Raza* was a student-led group with the main objectives of “the return of the Catholic Church to the oppressed Chicano community,” and that the church “become as radical as Christ.”¹⁵⁰ Organized in 1969, *Católicos* was comprised of three student groups in the city, including: the Chicano Law Students’ Association at Loyola University of Law, *La Raza* newspaper/magazine, and the United Mexican American Students (UMAS) chapter at Los Angeles City College. Under the leadership of Richard Martínez of LA City College and Richard Cruz of the LU School of Law, the group labored to put pressure on the local Catholic Church.

This organization not only provides an example of the practical purposes of church in the movement, but through Martínez’s words, it is evident that the Chicano Movement strategically employed religion. Similar to the African American population in the civil rights movement, Chicano activists knew that within the reality of a white Christian dominance, appealing to the morals and values within the majority would lead to increased sympathy and direct action. Speaking at a meeting, the student leader of UMAS explained that “if you have the Church standing with you in making a demand, it’s a hell of a lot more powerful than you standing by yourself. If the Bishop is next to me, I’m in good shape.”¹⁵¹ Martínez demonstrates the strategic logic that many activists shared, that in order to appeal to a white Christian majority, the use of

¹⁵⁰ Martin T. García. *Católicos: Resistance and Affirmation in Chicano Catholic History*, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2008), 137.

¹⁵¹ García, *Católicos*, 133.

religion and church were necessary. This furthermore alludes to the authority and control that the Catholic church had within the Chicano community. If the church would have been weak and feeble or would have had no functional utility, *Católicos* and Martínez would not have targeted the institution.

Student leader Cruz, though agreeing with Martínez, portrayed a more personalistic approach to the organization their movement thereof, citing more faith-based motivations to act. In explaining his upbringing, Cruz refers to Catechism and the Christian Brothers who taught him to apply his religious beliefs to the world.¹⁵² He further noted that amongst himself and other Chicanos, “what [they] took from their Catholic education involved a sense of morality, of good and evil, that they could apply to their social world.”¹⁵³ In these recollections, Cruz evidences that it was his faith and religious motivation that pushed him into politics and advocating for the oppressed and marginalized Chicano population. It was his religious convictions that taught him right from wrong, giving him a sense of morality and reason to take action.

Land-grants, Prophets, and Deliverance

The Chicano Movement also extended into the rural areas of the Southwest, mainly in the form of the Land Grant Movement. Led by La Alianza Federal de Mercedes, the sub-movement of Chicano Liberation focused on fulfilling land grants awarded by the Spanish government, preserved in the Mexican Revolution, and promised to the inhabitants of New Mexico following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the Mexican American War. Reies López Tijerina, the leader of La Alianza, took drastic measures to secure their aspirations. Gaining national

¹⁵² García, *Católicos*, 134.

¹⁵³ García, *Católicos*, 135.

recognition in 1967, Tijerina took armed action to occupy the Tierra Amarilla courthouse in New Mexico. By employing his rhetorical abilities and personal motivations as an evangelical preacher, King Tiger (as he was known), organized native Chicanos to take up arms against the American government.¹⁵⁴ Following the raid, while in prison, Tijerina penned a letter explaining his efforts, noting that “these uncomfortable conditions do not bother me, for I have a divine dream to give me strength ... I pray to God that all the Indo-Hispano people will awake to the need for unity, and to our heavenly and constitutional responsibility for fighting peacefully to win our rights.”¹⁵⁵ While Tijerina employed both peaceful and militant tactics in his fight for Chicano land, his inspiration and motivation from holy power evidences his mindset of a religious crusade. Considering himself the prophet of the Chicano people, Tijerina figuratively stood in place of Moses, freeing the Chicano people from the oppression and marginalization of the American government.

However, literature covering Tijerina’s involvement in the Chicano Movement attaches only this moment and extreme nationalism to his activist portfolio, even describing him as the Chicano “Malcolm X.”¹⁵⁶ While he did utilize militant techniques and was motivated by Chicano Nationalism, this interpretation ignores Tijerina’s emphatic religious motivation to be the deliverer of the Chicano Movement, leading his people to the Promised Land.¹⁵⁷ Growing up in a Catholic household and later becoming a Protestant preacher, Tijerina learned of the stories of the Biblical prophets. In his memoir, he recalls “I read about ... Abraham, David, Ishmael, and

¹⁵⁴ Peter Nabokov, *Tijerina and the Courthouse Raid*, (San Francisco: Ramparts Press, 1969), 81-83.

¹⁵⁵ University of North Carolina, “Reies López Tijerina, Chicano Protest, 1969,” College of Humanities and Social Sciences, n.d. Accessed Feb. 12, 2020, <https://faculty.chass.ncsu.edu/slatta/hi216/documents/tejerina.htm>.

¹⁵⁶ Reies López Tijerina, *They Called Me “King Tiger”*: My struggle for the land and our rights, translated by José Angel Gutiérrez, (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 2000), vii.

¹⁵⁷ Lorena Oropreza, *King of Adobe: Reies López Tijerina, Lost Prophet of the Chicano Movement*, (Raleigh, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 21.

Moses, who led his people to the Promised Land, and there throughout the prophets, I saw satisfaction for the yearning of my heart for justice and peace.”¹⁵⁸ This strong determination fed into the growth of a man that was unapologetic for his cause, unabashed in his rhetoric, and charismatic in his leadership. Throughout his life, the *King Tiger* would have various dreams of which he interpreted as messages and visions from God choosing him as the deliverer of the Chicano population in America.¹⁵⁹ While some people in his life characterized Tijerina as egotistical and hotheaded, they would concede that he could energize a crowd, convincing others to join his cause. Considering the evolution and strides that Tijerina took from a poor child in an immigrant family to a leader of a movement across an entire region of the United States, his personal interpretations and relations with the supernatural coincidentally pushed him to advocate for his community.

Conclusion

The Chicano movement, in a broad sense, involved a community of misplaced persons struggling through oppression and displacement to find safety and purpose. Caught between the isolation of not-American and not-Mexican, the Chicano people were compelled out of necessity to fight, advocate, and protest for just systems, representation, and living conditions. Uniquely, this population finds its roots in Native American tradition and heritage in centuries of Mexican culture, marked by the foreign oppression by the Spanish Empire. Within this context, religion and the church were able to flourish and hold an integral role in the success and functions of the Chicano Movement, including its many facets of cities, rural areas, and college campuses. While

¹⁵⁸ Oropreza, *King of Adobe*, 22.

¹⁵⁹ López Tijerina, *King Tiger*.

activism penetrated the various levels and aspects of the Chicano population, it was intertwined with an already existing and permeating culture of religious heritage and tradition. The Catholic Mass, community, and congregations acted as a headquarters and functioning arm for the movement. This proved true for even those who did not consider themselves to be religious or part of the church. Additionally, religion acted on the individual and corporate level as a personal motivation and reason for hope and purpose through suffering. In their faith, activists were able to endure persecution and oppression in light of the promise of justice and harmony. Religion also found its place within the movement as a mechanism of radicalization by equipping leaders and activists with a personally new interpretation and understanding of human dignity and prosperity. Through faith and religious teaching, activists recognized their worth and learned to not remain content in their situation in life.

Chapter 3

Religion in Nationalist Movements

Introduction

When considering the fight for equality, representation, and belonging within the history of the United States, it is important to not cease understanding at the end of the Classical Civil Rights Era, nor with a homogeneous description of significant movements and events. Religious involvement in the Chicano movement was not isolated to the more traditional first and second generations of immigrants in the United States, but rather adapted and evolved in order to remain relevant and survive the growing wave of pride and nationalist movements across the country. From Brooklyn to Oakland, Detroit to Albuquerque, American citizens were creating protective separation from the oppressive majority along lines of race, ethnicity, gender, and religion.

Internet resources and other scholarly publications lean into the narrative of religious unity, rhetoric, and intentions in the classical movement, while the Black Power Movement following King was purely secular, stripping the bondage of Christianity and other white institutions.¹⁶⁰ This, however, not only ignores the evolution of the Black Church, but also demerits organizations like the Nation of Islam and nullifies the spiritual experiences of Malcolm X within the Islamic faith. Crucially, the advocacy for Pan-Africanism and Black Pride was not void of religion or spiritual roots. The same critique is valid for the Chicano Movement as it evolved from *bracero* rights into Chicano national pride. With strong claims to nativity and

¹⁶⁰ Clayborne Carson, "American Civil Rights Movement," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, (Feb. 4, 2020, Accessed March 4, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/event/American-civil-rights-movement/From-black-power-to-the-assassination-of-Martin-Luther-King#ref1075983>); "Civil Rights Movement," Anti-Defamation League, n.d., accessed March 4, 2020, <https://www.adl.org/education/resources/backgrounders/civil-rights-movement>.

indigenous roots, the Chicano population employed geographic and ethnic spirituality, especially in advocacy for the homeland of *Aztlán*. Chicano religion existed accordingly in two forms: pure indigenous advocacy and a *mestizaje* of Spanish Catholicism and Mexican indigenous faiths.

An organization or government achieves nationalistic goals at the moment in which they attain “a claim on people’s loyalty, on their attention, on their solidarity ... [and] change the way people see themselves, to mobilize loyalties, kindle energies and articulate demands.”¹⁶¹

Nationalism is further understood as “a heterogeneous set of ‘nation’-oriented idioms, practices, and possibilities that are continuously available or ‘endemic’ in modern cultural and political life.”¹⁶² When a group advocated for a nationalist agenda, it was therefore imperative that certain measures were established and placed in motion, so that a vast population of people could adhere to the pride and conditions of that nation. In doing so, nationalist groups strived to create a common identity with a shared collective memory, so that they could form a homogenous community. By creating such a community, marginalized populations received a hope and a promise of relief and deliverance from their apparent circumstances. Considering these conditions, religion being a cultural and social characteristic so ingrained in the American societal psyche was advantageous and convenient for advocates to utilize.

The concepts of forming an identity and community worked in conjunction with the ideal of a so-called Promised Land or ideal utopia for the oppressed minority groups within the United States. By repurposing and redefining Christian faith and theology, the Black Church adapted to the Black Power Movement. By employing Islamic principles and having the image of Mecca,

¹⁶¹ Bart Bonikowski, “Nationalism in Settled Times,” *Annual Review of Sociology* vol. 42, (2016): 427-49.

¹⁶² Bonikowski, “Nationalism,” 430.

Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam were able to inspire and motivate masses within the North and urban areas on either coast. In culmination, Pan-Africanism acted as a point of unity between both religious ideologies with leaders in either camp advocating for a “bringing together of Black people across artificial national boundaries as one people, realizing that we are an African people ... [and Africa] is the Promised Land for Black people, a Promised Land which includes all Black people in all countries.”¹⁶³

Similarly, the Chicano Movement utilized religion and spirituality in its push for nationalism and racial pride. Influenced by both the historic Spanish Catholic Church, contemporary Protestant missions, and indigenous spiritual roots, Chicano Pride manifested itself in advocacy for *Aztlán*, the folk homeland of the Chicano people. By definition a displaced people, fixed at the intersection between Mexican and American countries, the Chicano population emphasized greatly the concept of homeland, advocating for such through indigenous spirituality and claims as the “inhabitants and civilizers of the northern land of Aztlán from whence came our forefathers, reclaiming the land of their birth and consecrating the determination of our people of the sun, declare that the call of our blood is our power, our responsibility, and our inevitable destiny.”¹⁶⁴

Black Nationalism

As the decade of the 1960s progressed, so too did black activism develop. The old guard was becoming usurped by the new guard; Martin Luther King Jr. and the non-violent movement

¹⁶³ Albert B. Cleage, Jr. *Black Christian Nationalism*. (New York: William and Morrow Company, 1972), 198

¹⁶⁴ Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán, “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán,” University of Michigan Archives, n.d. Accessed Feb. 20, 2020, <http://umich.edu/~mechaum/Aztlan.html>.

were becoming less effective with the rise of Black Power. Such was evident when in the summer of 1965, riots broke out across Watts, a racially segregated neighborhood in Los Angeles, California. Malcolm X had been assassinated in the spring of that year, and despite the Federal action from the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, African Americans across the country remained segregated and in poverty by inadequate implementation of the policies won by Dr. King and his cordial movement. Watts marked a noticeable change in direction of the civil rights movement as Rev. King was heckled and rejected as he arrived; his efforts had until then failed to cure the impoverished society known to the black population, which was held down by the thumb of police violence.¹⁶⁵ A new face was rising to the front of the black freedom struggle, one that was young, radical, and critical of the “moderate” approach of the SCLC and King.

Criticism of integrationist advocates from within the black community were loud and apparent. The Nation of Islam, for instance, openly opposed the classical period of civil rights and referred to Christianity as the “white man’s religion,” used by colonial powers to oppress and enslave the black man.¹⁶⁶ Believing that the black population was indeed the superior race, the Nation of Islam, led by Elijah Muhammad, adapted Islamic faith, combining it with black culture and needs, which spoke to the many black Americans within the North and urban settings. While the classical civil rights era appealed to and was effective in the South and more rural areas, the social and political situation of many outside of that region did not change, which allowed for activists such as X or Muhammad to use Islam and Black Power to gain a

¹⁶⁵ John Fuller and Kathryn Whitbourne, “Watts Riot, Black Power and MLK’s Legacy.” History.com, n.d. Accessed Dec. 3, 2019, <https://history.howstuffworks.com/historical-events/civil-rights-movement7.htm>.

¹⁶⁶ Scot Brown, *Fighting for US: Maulana Karenga, the US Organization, and Black Cultural Nationalism*. (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

stronghold. Issues within these communities were different than the rural south, with police brutality and individual dignity being main concerns, causing a strong opposition to the white status quo.¹⁶⁷ Islam additionally worked in the Black Power Movement to radicalize and mobilize young black men across the United States. Advocates within the faith argued that a man should be “the leader of the house/nation because his knowledge of the world is broader, his awareness is greater, his understanding is fuller and his application of this information is wiser.”¹⁶⁸ The faith gave black men the opportunity to have dignity and respect that they felt society had not given them.

In Muhammad’s view, the white man was the devil. Writing in *Message to the Black Man in America*, the prophet of the Nation of Islam wrote, “the devils reared the poor so-called negroes for 400 years ... they (the devils) kept them apart ... [deprived] them of any knowledge other than what he (the devil) has taught them ... the devils then seek to kill.”¹⁶⁹ Eliciting the comparison to the devil, Muhammad employed strong religious rhetoric to animate the white majority of America. In speaking to his audience, comparing one to the devil would be the most grievous definition of a sinfully impactful actor. Moreover, the characterization of devil removes any good intention or beneficial deed and fixes an all-encompassing understanding of ill-manner.

The Nation of Islam did not monopolize the utilization of religion in the Black Power Movement, however. The clergymen and congregations with the black church equally radicalized and evolved with their theology in the general movement. Ignoring this development and evolution of the black church in the late 1960s neglects central ideologies that emerged in

¹⁶⁷ Eric S. Brown, “Changing Political Fortunes: Race, Class, and ‘Black Power’ in the Rise and Fall of a Black Urban Regime in Oakland,” *Research in Political Psychology* vol. 24, (2017), 215-256.

¹⁶⁸ Ula Yvette Taylor. *The Promise of Patriarchy: Women and the Nation of Islam*. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 161.

¹⁶⁹ Elijah Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman in America*. (Irving, TX: Secretarius Mempus Publications, 2006).

direct response to the criticisms claimed by the overt leaders of the movement. Primarily, James H. Cone developed the concept of Black Theology in his 1969 book, *Black Theology and Black Power*. In his writing, Cone applies black nationalism and black pride to a theological understanding of the Bible, interpreting that the Gospel is a story of oppression of God in human form and his people, the Jews, therefore it is most relevant to African Americans, the most oppressed group in America.¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, Cone takes from both Rev. King and Malcolm X regarding the utility of the black church, yet the radicality of Black Power. Cone incorporated the functionality of the church in writing Black Theology yet distanced himself from respectability politics and other nonviolent tactics. In order to claim the supreme relevance of Christianity, the church further theologized that Jesus was black, suffering at the hands of white oppressors and occupiers.¹⁷¹

Albert Cleage Jr. opened the gates of the black church to Black Nationalism as a minister and writer for the Michigan Chronicle and minister of the Church of the Black Madonna in Detroit, advocating for black separatism. Cleage Jr. coined the term *Black Messiah* and also racially equated the Jews to African Americans, a racially oppressed group in land that was not their home. Further in line with black power and nationalism, Black Theology, Black Jesus, and the black church portrayed an absolutist doctrine such that declared no white man innocent of injustices against the black man. Similar to the notions of Black Nationalism, the absolutist doctrine quickly led to a religious separatist movement, which saw black church members withdrawing from interracial churches to start their own out of motivation to cater to their needs as an oppressed and misunderstood people that were not properly cared for in mixed

¹⁷⁰ James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997).

¹⁷¹ Albert B. Cleage, Jr. *The Black Messiah*. (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2017).

congregations. Black Liberation Theology, rooted in black power, brought the black church into the discussion of pan-Africanism, militant activism, and the new, younger leadership of the Black Power Movement.

Black Theology

Emerging in the black church in response to the criticisms of the newly radical Black Power Movement, black theology combined the religious appeal and optimal functionality of the church like Rev. King, while also adopting a black-first nationalism such as championed by Malcolm X.¹⁷² Writing late in his life, Cone argues that “we should not listen to Martin’s ‘I have a Dream’ speech without also listening to Malcom’s answer in his ‘Message to the Grass Roots.’” Without confronting the American nightmare that Malcolm bore witness to, we will never be able to create the beloved community articulated so well by Martin King.”¹⁷³

According to Cone, there are six fundamental principles that are included in the understanding of Black Theology, as compared to what was preached by white churches. The first is that it is methodological, utilizing the history and foundations of the black church in America to inform and enlighten those suffering under the same plight. Hayrand S. Wilmore expands upon this notion, explaining that there are three main sources for Black Theology: (1) the existing black community, (2) the writings and preaching of black pastors, and (3) the religions and traditions of Africa that were assimilated into African American Christianity.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Ian S. Markham, “Black Theology,” in *The Student’s Companion to the Theologians*. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 371-377.

¹⁷³ James H. Cone, *Risks of Faith: The Emergence of a Black Theology of Liberation, 1968-1998*. (Boston: Bacon Press, 2005).

¹⁷⁴ Markham, “Black Theology.”

This argument opines that Christianity is not only an interpretation for African Americans, but it is rather the interpretation that should be accepted by all Christian churches. The Bible is a story of liberation from oppression, freeing the Jews from Roman occupation. Therefore, Black Theology is “the affirmation of black humanity that emancipates black people from white racism, thus providing authentic freedom for both white and black people.”¹⁷⁵ Black folk traditions, paired with culturally significant rituals from the pulpit, and the emphasis of African contributions to black Christianity are the root of understanding Black Theology. Cone therefore criticizes integration if it means “accepting the white man’s style, his values, or his religion.”¹⁷⁶ Highlighting the importance of black culture, Cone emphasizes how tradition and culture were created through oppression; “In Black Theology, the Black cultural experience is a religious one, touched by God, worthy of honor, and to which successful liberation movements must turn for direction.”¹⁷⁷

The second fundamental principle explains that the Bible is a story of freedom from oppression, that of Middle Eastern Jews from their European Roman oppressors. Black Theology focuses on the suffering of the Jewish people, more so that of Jesus who suffered and died at the hands of white occupiers. Cone included that by reading the Bible in the eyes of suffering, the reader can better understand that “God cares about injustice, oppression, and poverty, and obliges us to work for the liberation of those suffering.”¹⁷⁸ Published in 1969, a declaration from the National Committee of Black Churchmen better summarizes that “Black Theology is a theology of ‘Blackness.’ It is the affirmation of black humanity that emancipates black people

¹⁷⁵ National Committee of Black Churchmen, Statement as reproduced in James Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, eds., *Black Theology*, (June 13, 1969).

¹⁷⁶ Micah W. Kubic, “Between Malcolm and Martin: James Cone’s Black Theology as Pragmatic Ideological Alternative,” *Souls* vol. 11, no. 4, (2009): 448-467.

¹⁷⁷ Kubic, “Between Malcolm and Martin.”

¹⁷⁸ Markham, “Black Theology.”

from white racism, thus providing authentic freedom for both white and black people.”¹⁷⁹ Cone additionally elaborates:

[Christ’s message] is a message about the ghetto, and all other injustices done in the name of democracy and religion to further the social, political, and economic interests of the oppressor. In Christ, God enters human affairs and takes sides with the oppressed. Their suffering becomes his; their despair, divine despair. Through Christ, the poor man is offered freedom now to rebel against that which makes him other than human.¹⁸⁰

In this, Cone is attempting to claim Christianity for the African American population.

Moreover, he opines that because Christ suffered at the hands of an oppressor, black America should identify more strongly with the Gospel than their racial counterparts.

The third fundamental principle of Black Theology has been advanced and evolved throughout the years, but its genesis is rooted in the idea of self-love. Black theologians allude to passages such as 1 John that says, “we love God because God first loved us,” which includes an obvious notion that in order to love others, one must first love themselves. Black Theology emphasizes this point because of the blatant contradictory understanding that “love involves selflessness” or that “love is self-giving.”¹⁸¹ By adopting this view, those that subscribe to Black Theology had a “chance ... to believe that there is hope for the future and a meaning to struggle.”¹⁸²

Contextual theology is the fourth aspect of Black Theology, which takes into account the context of the time that the Bible was written, its location, by who it was written, and to whom it was sent. By doing so, Black Theology attempts to contradict the blue-eyed, blonde depiction of Jesus, reclaiming the blackness of Christ. Cone elaborated further on an ideological level that

¹⁷⁹ National Committee of Black Churchmen, 1969 Statement.

¹⁸⁰ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*.

¹⁸¹ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*.

¹⁸² Kubic, “Between Martin and Malcolm.”

“Christ is black because he is oppressed, and oppressed because he is black,” relating to the situation of black Americans in systemic poverty.¹⁸³

The fifth aspect of Black Theology attempts to understand the extent of suffering, why it is occurring and how or why justice will come to fruition. In so doing, Cone attempted to combat the notion that God was a racist. One argument that emerged explained that black people were suffering because of moral evil and sin, therefore suffering was retribution for their actions, however Cone argues that if this were the case, an equal proportion of each race would be suffering, therefore it is rather the abuse of power by an oppressor that brings suffering to such an extent. Cone includes this argument into Black Theology to combat the notion of righteous suffering, which allowed white Europeans to continually oppress Black and Brown people under the guise of moral superiority and godly-ordained suffering.

The last fundamental aspect of Black Theology is the inclusion of “womanist” theology, attempting to include black women in the religious landscape and fight against oppression due to the intersectionality of their plight. Kelly Delamine Brown Douglas touches upon this, explaining that womanist theology “points to the richness and complexity of being Black and female in a society that tends to devalue both Blackness and womanhood.”¹⁸⁴ This divulges from the classical civil rights era in which leaders often sidelined women to administrative roles or respectability tokens, such as Rosa Parks in the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Cone and others thought it important to include the viewpoint of women in their interpretation of the Gospel, because if their motivation was to connect the suffering and oppression of the Bible to that of

¹⁸³ James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Gilmore, *Black Theology: A Documentary History, Volume 1: 1966-1979*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993).

¹⁸⁴ James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Gilmore, *Black Theology: A Documentary History, Volume 2: 1980-1992*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993).

African Americans, Black women had to be central because of their double oppression, both black and female being the least of society.

Black Jesus and the Verdict

Albert H. Cleage Jr., founder of Shrine of the Black Madonna Church, and activist throughout the South and Michigan, released the foundation-laying literature of Black Theology, opening the ideas of the world of Black Power and Nationalism to the theological ideologies of the black church. In 1968, Cleage Jr. released *The Black Messiah* an open critique on the white church, colonial Christianity, and European powers, while simultaneously reclaiming the race and origins of Christ as a Middle Eastern black man. According to Cleage Jr. not only was Christ black, but Israel was a black nation with Jesus as its racial liberator.¹⁸⁵

Throughout his activism, Cleage Jr. encouraged black churches to reinterpret the race of the Bible and what it meant to the Black nation within America. To aid this mission, the minister created the Black Christian National Movement in 1967 to address the “social, economic, and political needs of black people” and how Jesus’ teachings directly relate to their struggle.¹⁸⁶

Critics within the Black Power Movement and the Nation of Islam openly took aim at the black church and Christianity as previously mentioned, but while Black Power reached through cities and college campuses, it also reached the inner chambers and pulpits of the nation’s black churches. Rev. Albert B. Cleage Jr., a contemporary of Cone, knew that “religion is a powerful mobilizer in Black communities and church culture - including parables, preaching styles,

¹⁸⁵ James H. Cone, *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 18.

¹⁸⁶ “Albert Cleage,” in *This Far by Faith*, WPSU, n.d. Accessed Dec. 12, 2019, https://www.pbs.org/thisfarbyfaith/people/albert_cleage.html.

spirituals, and rites - provide valuable social cues, capable of symbolizing and synthesizing a desired message for the community,” yet he was not willing to follow the precedent of the ineffective moderate non-violent movement under King.¹⁸⁷ While prescribing to Black Nationalism, Rev. Cleage Jr. and others refused to leave the church that was not only influential in their own lives but was increasingly useful in reaching the masses. As Micah W. Kubic writes, “they refused to abandon the merits of the church ... [but] doing so was possible only by fundamentally reconceiving what it meant to be a Black Christian through reclamation and reaffirmation of the Black church tradition of resistance.”¹⁸⁸ The church was what they knew, but more importantly it was a functional mechanism to bring unity and identity to a national movement.

During the Black Power Movement, the black church extends Dr. King’s absolutism, stating that not one man is innocent. There are those that directly contribute to systemic oppression against African Americans with overt racism, but there are also those that are quiet or polite racists. Black Christian absolutism extended to the white churches across America that were actively ignorant or passive. As Markham explains, “Black Theology clearly defines friends and enemies and places little faith in the historic liberal notion of the efficacy of appeals to white reason or compassion,” which juxtaposes the strategy of respectability politics of the MLK Movement.¹⁸⁹ Writing in *Black Theology and Black Power*, Cone defines these enemies as those who suggest that:

Their town (because of their unselfish involvement in civil rights) is better or less racist than others. ... There are no degrees of human freedom or human dignity. Either a man respects another as a person or he does not. ... All white men are responsible for white oppression. It is much too easy to say, “Racism is not my fault,” or “I am not

¹⁸⁷ Cleage, *Black Christian Nationalism*.

¹⁸⁸ Kubic, “Between Martin and Malcolm,” 455.

¹⁸⁹ Markham, “Black Theology.”

responsible for the country's inhumanity to the Black man." The American white man has always had an easy conscience. But insofar as white do-gooders tolerate and sponsor racism in their educational institutions, their political, economic, and social structures, their churches, and in every other aspect of American life, they are directly responsible for racism.¹⁹⁰

Much like the stray from respectability politics and the leniency towards white passiveness, Black Theology and Black Power in the church provided room for violent holy retribution against the oppressor. Cone asserted that the Black Church must express this retribution only in the rarest of circumstances such that protest and rhetoric cannot suffice. Moreover, Cone critiqued the notion of nonviolence as a perpetuation of the white Jesus "who tries to convince us that there is no difference between American democracy and Christian freedom, that violence is no way to respond to inhumanity."¹⁹¹

Chicano Nationalism

At the turn of the decade into the 1970s, César Chávez and the workers he led, while still active, found themselves alongside a new, more radical branch of the Chicano Movement. The movement and what it stood for was evolving from a specific focus to *bracero* rights – such as work conditions and the right to unionize – and shifting to a more general focus on the plight against the Chicano community. Such a nationalist movement therefore requires three major tenants, which were also visible in the African American movement. These include a shared identity that is distinctively separated from the white majority, a generated sense of hope that gives purpose to oppression, and the notion of a Promised Land or utopia that will geographically unites and protects them from systematic abuse.

¹⁹⁰ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*.

¹⁹¹ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 40.

Who is Chicano?

In the specific situation of the Chicano Movement, their shared identity came directly from the concept of Chicano. Originally instituted as a derogatory slur against poor Mexican-American farm hands, the term was re-adopted during the movement to distinguish its population from both the white majority of the United States and their ancestral majority of Mexico.¹⁹² *El Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán* or the Chicano Student Movement of Aztlán (MEChA) released a declaration in the spring of 1969 called *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* (The Spiritual Plan of Aztlán) outlining this separation of a distinct nation, including that “in the spirit of a new people that is conscious not only of its proud historical heritage but also of the brutal ‘gringo’ invasion of our territories, we, the Chicano inhabitants and civilizers ... declare that the call of our blood is our power, our responsibility, and our inevitable destiny.”¹⁹³ While they would further distinguish their demands and goals, MEChA specifically exemplifies the active distinction that the Chicano Movement was making; they were a “new people” separated from their Mexican forefathers and American invaders. Included in this intentional separation was the underlying aspects of religion in both communities, which allowed for the emergence of indigenous spirituality.

Aztlán, the ancestral homeland of the Chicano people represented not literally a geographic region, but rather much more an ideology that was anti-European religion and colonialism. Viewing American and Mexican society at large as manifestations of colonialism and oppressive Spanish Catholicism, the Chicano Aztlán was a rallying cry to unite under the shared ancestral tie to the land. MEChA wrote, “with our heart in our hands and our hands in the

¹⁹² Rodriguez, *Rethinking the Chicano Movement*.

¹⁹³ Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán, “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlan.”

soil, we declare the independence of our mestizo nation. We are a bronze people with a bronze culture. Before the world, before all of North America, before all our brothers in the bronze continent, we are a nation, we are a union of free pueblos, we are Aztlan.”¹⁹⁴ Reminiscent of the theology of liberation that swept through the continent against Spanish imperialism, *Chicanoism* in this sense portrays itself as a denomination of *indigenism*.

Rodolfo Corky Gonzales, a leader on college campuses in the movement, evidences this sense of indigenous nationalism in his poem “Yo Soy Joaquín/I am Joaquín.” In the poem, Gonzales outlines the pride, frustration, pain, and joy that make up the typical Chicano individual, which is personified in the character “Joaquín.”¹⁹⁵ Importantly, however, in characterizing Joaquín, Gonzales creates juxtapositions to historical actors in the timeline of the Chicano people, of which when understood together offer a better picture of Chicano culture through spirituality and ancestral connection. Spotted throughout the poem, Gonzales speaks through Joaquín, claiming:

I am Cuauhtémoc ... I am Nezahualcóyotl ... I was part in blood and spirit of that courageous village priest Hidalgo ... I am Emiliano Zapata ... I am the Rurales ... I am the mountain Indian ... I am the despots Díaz and Huerta and the apostle of democracy, Francisco Madero ... I am faithful, humble Juan Diego, the Virgin of Guadalupe, Tonantzin, Aztec goddess, too ... I am Aztec prince and Christian Christ.¹⁹⁶

These connections allude to Chicano culture being deeply rooted to not only in revolutionaries and politicians, but crucially to indigenous peoples, deities, and rulers and to various religious institutions and people in both Mesoamerican religions and Judeo-Christian traditions. Gonzales strategically includes persons and characters that throughout Mexican

¹⁹⁴ Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán, “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlan.”

¹⁹⁵ Rodolfo Corky Gonzales, “Yo Soy Joaquín,” edited by Dr. Antonio Rafael de la Cova, Dec. 15, 1997. Accessed March 10, 2020, <https://www.latinamericanstudies.org/latinos/joaquin.htm>.

¹⁹⁶ Gonzales, “Yo Soy Joaquín.”

American history may have been working in opposition to one another, such that the Chicano people were born out of this. For example, Cuauhtémoc and Nezahualcóyotl were indigenous rulers of Tenochtitlan and Texcoco, respectively, however Díaz and Huerta were oppressive Mexican leaders of the Mexican Revolution Era.¹⁹⁷ Furthermore, Joaquín identifies as the Virgin of Guadalupe and Christ, two central figures to the Christian faith, while he also is connected to Tonantzín, the Aztec mother goddess. Extending beyond the individual, Joaquín represents the Chicano population and culture at large; a population and culture with foundations in Mesoamerican indigeneity and Christian traditions. It is therefore with this understanding of what it meant to be Chicano, that when MEChA and other organizations called for unity under their shared identity, they were addressing not only the deep racial ancestry but also their religious heritage.

The Chicano Homeland

Much like the Black Power Movement, the later Chicano Movement advocated for a significant consolidation of people and land. As Africa acted in place of a homeland to the former, the Chicano Movement uniquely advocated for a homeland within America, a proposition that brought its own challenges and distinctions. Importantly, the movement's claim to a homeland is deeply influenced by indigenous earth spirituality and their own Christian-influenced beliefs and institutions.

¹⁹⁷ Robert M. Carmack, Janine Gasco, and Gary H. Gossen. *The Legacy of Mesoamerica: History and culture of a Native American Civilization*. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2007).

According to Richard L. Nostrand, author of *The Hispano Homeland*, the concept of a homeland in general entails three basic elements: a people, a place, and identity with place.¹⁹⁸ Accordingly, one “must have lived in a place long enough to have adjusted to its natural environment and to have left their impress in the form of a cultural landscape. ... they must have developed an identity with the land – emotional feelings of attachment, desires to possess, even compulsions to defend.”¹⁹⁹ The Chicano population did achieve such an appreciation and belonging to the land, as MEChA wrote, “We are free and sovereign to determine those tasks which are justly called for by our house, our land, the sweat of our brows, and by our hearts. Aztlan belongs to those who plant the seeds, water the fields, and gather the crops.”²⁰⁰ In this sense, the Chicano nation claimed ownership of the land due to their tending and tilling of its earth, therefore through their history of not only their *bracero* work but more importantly to the long-standing relationship with the land before colonizers arrived and displaced the native peoples. This is reminiscent to Native American religion, which places a spiritual measure on the ecosystem and earth, that it is a balance between them, the earth, and the gods.²⁰¹ The Chicano claim to rights of the land can also be seen through a traditional Navajo chant:

The mountains, I become part of it ...
 The herbs, the fir tree, I become part of it.
 The morning mists, the clouds, the gathering waters,
 I become part of it.
 The wilderness, the dew drops, the pollen ...
 I become part of it.²⁰²

¹⁹⁸ Nostrand, *Hispano Homeland*.

¹⁹⁹ Nostrand, *Hispano Homeland*, 214.

²⁰⁰ Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán, “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán.”

²⁰¹ “Land and Identity,” Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, n.d. Accessed March 10, 2020, <https://americanindian.si.edu/exhibitions/indivisible/land.html>.

²⁰² Annie L. Booth, “We Are the Land: Native American Views of Nature,” in *Nature Across Cultures: Views of Nature and the Environment in Non-Western Cultures*, edited by Helaine Selin, (New York: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003):329-350, 334.

This link with the land can further be compared to the statements of Ojibwa Winona

LaDuke regarding taking from the land:

Whether it is wild rice, whether it is fish, whether it is deer or turtles, when you go and take something from the land, you pray before you take it. You offer tobacco, you offer a prayer to that spirit and to the creation of a part of that. You take those things because you have a relationship with all the other parts of the creation. That is why you are allowed to take those things. You take that and you give something back as a reciprocal arrangement, because that is how you maintain your relationship.²⁰³

Through this indigenous frame of mind in relation to the earth and occupying land, the Chicano claims to Aztlán, or more generally Northern Mexico and the Southwestern United States, imply that through their indigenous roots and plights of *bracero* work through the 20th century, they have an established relationship with the land.

In comparing the Chicano Promised Land to other nationalist utopias, religion is a distinguishing factor. It is important to consider how cities across the Southwestern United States have religious toponyms, such as Santa Fe (Holy Faith), Santa Cruz (Holy Cross), and Las Cruces (The Crosses) among others. Additional cities evidence the connection of patron saints to community and geography, receiving their names from the likes of San Pablo (Saint Paul), San Jose (Saint Joseph), and San Juan (Saint John). Moreover, within these cities, the Catholic church was a center staple in the community, and between the cities, religious shrines occupied various junctions along rural roads.²⁰⁴ Specifically in New Mexico, these connections were even stronger in the history of the Chicano people, as residents did not refer to their region as “New Mexico,” but rather the “Reino/Kingdom” or “Patria/Homeland.”²⁰⁵ During the years leading up to and during the Chicano movement in reference to *bracero* and migrant farm labor, this history

²⁰³ Booth, “We Are the Land,” 333.

²⁰⁴ Nostrand, *Hispano Homeland*, 222-3.

²⁰⁵ Nostrand, *Hispano Homeland*, 223.

helps understand the importance of the Catholic church in relation to belonging and community in the Chicano population. As families moved from region to region, following the harvest across America, the family and faith were the two traditions within their culture and community that traveled with the workers. Religious traditions, ceremonies, and holidays allowed for immigrants to “foment the immigration of family members or friends, to search for or ask for the hand of a girlfriend, to celebrate marriage, ... to reinforce their social relations, to reaffirm their identity, to make public their fidelity to their communal origins, and to define their pertinence to their birthplace.”²⁰⁶ Therefore, when considering the return to Aztlán or the *Patria*, the church and faith would have been included in the utopian vision of consolidation and unification of the Chicano people. With the traditions and institutions of the church so deeply ingrained in the culture of the community, the envisioned prosperity and peace of independence and separation from the United States and Mexico, surely would have included religious freedom, congregation, family, and prayer. The church and the sense of family that which it instilled would be considered part of ideal normalcy.

Conclusion

Nationalist movements require a shared sense of identity that contributes to the advocacy of ethnic or racial separatism and exclusion of other groups. The utilization of religion both individually and strategically was not left by activists in the classical civil rights movement or early Chicano movement. Furthermore, as the civil rights movement and Chicano movement

²⁰⁶ Victor M. Espinosa, “El día emigrante y el retorno del purgatorio: Iglesia, migración a los Estados Unidos y cambio sociocultural en un pueblo de Los Altos de Jalisco,” *Estudios Sociológicos* 17, no. 50, (1999): 375-418. My translation.

evolved into an era of pride and power, activists did not reserve religion as motivation for only non-violent tactics, rather the mechanisms and ideologies of faith shifted. The Nation of Islam and their prophet Elijah Muhammad took hold amongst urban centers across the country, engaging young black men to gain dignity and respect in community service and outreach, fulfilling the shortfalls of the local and federal government. Ideologies within black churchgoers also shifted, garnering a more radical theology that claimed Christianity as a black man's religion. They argued the Roman Empire, white colonizers, oppressed the black nation of Israel, therefore the religion is more applicable to the plight of African Americans. Developing from the initial demands of workers' rights, the Chicano movement equipped an indigenous spirituality that connected their efforts to the land in which they worked. Their use of religion evidenced an exclusive claim based on a spiritual relationship with the earth. These beliefs further extended into the movements push for a return to their Aztlán, a spiritual homeland of the Chicano people located in the southwestern United States.

Conclusion

By secularizing the Civil Rights Era, key ideologies and central functions are eliminated or poorly understood in their historical context. Simply labeling activists as “communist” or “radical” fails to explain what situations, experiences, and beliefs systems influenced their radicalization. Furthermore, the facility of church acted as a safe haven and sanctuary for activists, which functionally fights the historical narrative as these populations were oppressed and marginalized out of land and property ownership and also adequate sources of income in gran part. In the middle of the 20th century, the institution of church held a privileged role in these communities, acting as a hub functionally, financially, and socially. By not including this facet, not only are the epicenters of various events displaced, but even more so, it inadequately represents the magnitude and significance of marginalization. The church body and institution was safety to African Americans who were not permitted elsewhere and regularly faced racial intimidation and violent deterrents from participating in society. The church’s functions and traditions were familiar to Chicano families who valued their heritage while following a migratory harvest.

In constructing a movement, solidarity and unity are sought after, which requires a common identity, shared hope, and common goal. Religion worked as the crux between nation-building and movement mobilization as minority populations, specifically African Americans and Chicanos, were able to band together in search of the Promised Land and deliverance. Partaking in the same brotherhood, these movements adapted faith from their traditional understandings and carried it in conjunction with other nationalist movements. Importantly, the Civil Rights Era welcomed the involvement of religion, a tactic of which was nearly necessary in a predominantly Christian nation that was not responding to the pathos of legal and social

obligation. Religion furthermore did not cease its involvement in the activism of the 20th century as it adapted and continued to be utilized into militant, nationalist, and pride movements.

By incorporating religion into the history of the Left and the civil rights movement, mobilization, interaction, and activism in the modern Democratic party carry a clearer significance and greater impact. Touted as one of his most memorable presidential moments, Barack Obama broke into singing “Amazing Grace” with the crowd joining in at the eulogy of pastor Clementa Pinckney who died in the Charleston, South Carolina church shooting of 2015.²⁰⁷ Through the historical context of the intersection of faith and the African American struggle, the significance and meaning of this moment can fully be understood. By acknowledging the stable role that church functions played in the lives of the Chicano population, and Latino immigrants in general, the goals and purpose of outreach programs such as The Esperanza center of Catholic Charities of Baltimore and the Casa Alitas of Catholic Community Services in Southern Arizona become more transparent.²⁰⁸ Religion occupies one of the central facets in American life within individuals, families, and organizations, and the civil rights era is not an exception to this. As the Evangelical Right can be traced to the rise of the New Right in the 1960s, the same should be possible for churchgoers and people of faith on the Left. Including activists’ religion and the institutional role of church during the fight for civil rights, enables an enlightened understanding of modern politics, demographics, and more importantly the grassroots mobilization and historic ties of the Left.

²⁰⁷ Sarah L. Kauffman, “Why Obama’s singing of ‘Amazing Grace’ is so powerful,” Arts and Entertainment, *The Washington Post*, June 26, 2015. Accessed on April 18, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2015/06/26/why-obamas-singing-of-amazing-grace-is-so-powerful/>.

²⁰⁸ Catholic Charities USA, “Catholic Charities is Committed to Helping Immigrants & Refugees,” Immigration & Refugee Services, n.d. Accessed on April 18, 2020, <https://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/our-ministry/immigration-refugee-services/>.

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ACADEMIC VITA

EDUCATION

The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

May 2020

Schreyer Honors College

Paterno Fellows

Bachelor of Arts in History, Political Science and Spanish

Honors in History and Spanish

Thesis Title: Let My People Go: Religion in the Civil Rights Movement and Chicano Movement

Thesis Advisory Committee: Dr. Amira Rosa Davis, Dr. Cathleen Cahill, Dr. John Lipski

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Steinbacher, Goodall, & Yurchak Law Firm

Feb. 2020 – Present

Legal Assistant

- Interact with a 30-person law firm to provide expert and perfect legal advice and documents in elder care and special needs law.
- Report to the firm's attorneys to assist in document preparation, resource accumulation, client interactions, etc.

Masorti Law Group, P.C.

Feb. 2017 – July 2019

Law Clerk

- Conducted legal research and writing in various cases within criminal law.
- Delegated and organized a team of 1-2 interns, 1 private investigator, 1 social media consultant, and 2 advertisement consultants.
- Completed typical office tasks including writing letters and emails, scanning and filing documents, answering telephones, and interacting directly with clients.

Young Scholars of Central PA

Sept. 2017 – Jan. 2018

Extended Day Program Teacher

- Planned lessons for three interactive after-school clubs focused on world cultures, comparative politics, and journalism for nearly 30 students in Kindergarten through Eighth grade.
- Communicated with school faculty and officials to keep a fluid, dynamic, and progressive work environment.

Center for Global Studies

Sept. 2017 – Dec. 2017

Intern

- Collaborated with fellow intern to plan and host distinguished speakers on Penn State's campus such as Dr. Jens-Uwe Guettel and Dr. Bassem Youssef.
- Communicated in office or via internet and phone with office colleagues to promote a mobile and dynamic experience.
- Organized, edited, and distributed newsletters, press releases, and promotional posters for events.
- Utilized social media to promote events and gain followers of the CGS.

Lebanon Daily News

June 2016 – June 2018

Freelance Journalist

- Brainstormed story ideas to present to newspaper editors.

- Traveled to field locations, interviewed people related to the topic, and wrote news article of minimum 600 words.
- Communicated with staff of 19 to help publish a professional, daily newspaper.
- Wrote an online blog titled *The Elephant in the Room* to discuss modern American politics from a millennial perspective

LEADERSHIP

The Salt Company at Penn State

May 2018 – May 2020

President

- Collaborate with team of 3 officers and 3 advisors to promote organization and host events weekly on Penn State's campus.
- Worked to bring regular weekly attendance from 60 to 130 in 2 years.
- Familiarize myself and carry organization in agreement with university policies and codes.

Young Americans for Liberty at Penn State

Aug. 2016 – Aug. 2017

President

- Worked with a team of 5 officers to promote and plan events on campus dealing with the Constitution, civil liberties, civil rights, and civil disobedience to school codes that the club recognized and with which the club disagreed.
- Began as secretary but was elected President following the resignation of that position in late Winter.
- Communicated with local newspapers, professors, other students, other student organizations, and school administration to create awareness of the club's political goals and viewpoints.