

## **The Banality of Racism: The Spirit of Capitalism and Mass Incarceration**

-For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must make a new start, develop a new way of thinking, and endeavor to create a new man.-  
—Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

### **-Introduction-**

American notions of democracy, capitalism, and “freedom for all” are not as they appear.

Contrarily, these notions Americans hold dear, saturated in white supremacy, are devices of domination and control rather than prosperity and happiness. There is a history in the United States of labeling targeted populations as criminal and dangerous and thus, subjugating these populations to conditions of poverty and vast unemployment, becoming the victims of violence and homicide, and the imposition of slavery and mass incarceration. The benefits to be reaped from democracy, capitalism, and freedom has never been “for all,” but for the few. The few use, at times intentionally and other times unintentionally, these very notions to ironically justify, among many atrocities, the largest prison system in the world.

Though the United States contains about 5 percent of the world’s population, it contains nearly a quarter of the world’s prisoners. A number equaling nearly 2 million. The profit margins do not even account for this bloated prison population considering California officials, in 2010, considered releasing thousands of prisoners to balance the state budget.<sup>1</sup> This statistic ought to be jarring in itself, yet more disturbingly, despite those identifying as African American comprise only 10 percent of the United States population, half of all African Americans, since the 1930’s, have been incarcerated.<sup>2</sup> How can such a gross mistreatment and violation of human rights exist in a country that claims to guarantee the life, liberty and happiness of all of its citizens?

To this day, politicians, law-makers, and citizens alike will argue that the African American race is genetically predisposed to violent behavior and criminality despite this particular line of argumentation

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<sup>1</sup> Jennifer Graber, *The Furnace of Affliction: Prisons & Religion in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Manning Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America: Problems in Race, Politica, Economy, and Society* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 1983, ed. 2015), 107, 112-3.

having been proven, time and time again, to be an abhorrent misconception and fraudulent form of scientism. In fact, race, what Stuart Hall refers to as the *floating signifier*, has no relevance as to what characteristics an individual may or may not exhibit.<sup>3</sup> Though genetics is the most potent argument used to instill racism presently, Hall indicates that those in power (most often colonial empires) have invoked the particular dominant world-view of their time, whether it be religion, anthropology, or science, to instill the notion that specific populations are less than human and eligible for subjugation towards monetary or other ends. Yet the question remains, how does a post-racial, post-colonial, modern, capitalist nation such as the United States incarcerate such a disproportional amount of African Americans? Because the United States is far from being post-racial or post-colonial. Rather, this nation-state is haunted by the afterglow of what Max Weber coined, “the spirit of capitalism,” which I argue, has instilled, at a structural level, an attitude of banality towards racism. This essay is primarily philosophical in nature, and examines the Protestant underpinnings of banal racism and mass incarceration in the United States.

I claim that the residual affects of double predetermination Protestant theology paved the way for not only the “capitalist spirit,” as Weber argued, but chattel slavery, Jim Crow laws, and mass incarceration as well. This particular theology birthed capitalism and with it, a dichotomous *Weltanschauung*, wherein, what scholars refer to as, the property of whiteness, was instilled with the election for salvation, purity, and prosperity; while the property of blackness, was instilled with election for damnation, danger, and criminality.<sup>4</sup> It is this overarching world-view that has effected the extreme underdevelopment of African Americans and deeply embedded structural racism within the United States.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore within this world-view, those afflicted with blackness and deemed elect for damnation are punished for their sins by either slavery, poverty, or incarceration. To support these claims,

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<sup>3</sup> Stuart Hall, Lecture: *Race: The Floating Signifier*. (1997). Media Education Foundation. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bMo2uiRAf30&list=PL6927D30BB26C0E8D&index=1>). Though I am citing Stuart Hall’s *The Floating Signifier*, there are countless studies across nearly every academic field that show the falsity of genetics articulating particular characteristics of races of people.

<sup>4</sup> James Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 151. In my use of the term “blackness” I am invoking James Cone’s notion of blackness as a concept and way of thinking rather than having anything to do with skin color, despite the obvious associations between black skin and blackness as a way of thinking. Cone writes in reference to the Black Power movement, “Being black in America has little to do with skin color. Being black means that your heart, your soul, your mind, and your body are where the dispossessed are.”

<sup>5</sup> I want to stress that this world-view is responsible for the condemnation of many target populations in the United States such as the Native Americans, yet this paper focuses particularly on African Americans.

I utilize the work of the scholars Michelle Alexander, Khalil Gibran Muhammad, and Stephan A. Berrey to illuminate the condemning connectivity between blackness and criminality in the United States.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the hegemonically imposed attributes of blackness upon African Americans fosters, what W.E.B Du Bois coined as, “double-consciousness,” or the struggle to reconcile a diasporic identity as both an African and an American. Because of this, the African American is never completely American or African but, through the eyes of white America, a dangerous amalgamation of threatening and enchanting characteristics.<sup>7</sup> Throughout the essay, I hope to gesture towards a breaking of this doubleness through the exposition of the inexcusable, criminal, and dichotomous affects whiteness has had upon American society.

Religion is all too often glossed over as something apparent (or not even considered) within conversations concerning the intersections between blackness and criminality. Scholars of religious studies recognize the importance of maintaining working definitions (despite the possibility for such definitions to fall into utter ambiguity) of religion and religious terminology considering the dynamic significations of religion, which are dependent upon the particular context in which religions or religious themes are examined. Scholars of religion have the experience to sift through nebulously religious issues, and draw conclusions based upon the assumption that religion functions for an individual or a society as both obvious and obscure. In other words, *everyone* feels as though they know ‘religion’ when they see it, but upon closer inspection what appeared to be transparent phenomena transition into opacity. And though, religious studies scholars such as Sylvester Johnson, David Chidester, Jennifer Gruber, Winnifred

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<sup>6</sup> Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010.), Khalil G. Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), Stephan A. Berry, *The Jim Crow Routine: Everyday Performance of Race, Civil Rights, and Segregation in Mississippi* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015.)

<sup>7</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2002). One could invoke Douglas’ theory of purity and danger to describe this manifestation of racism and double-consciousness as “matter out of place” in the United States. In her examination of the “hoary old puzzle” of how and why particular animals and activities were labeled as abominations by the authors of Leviticus she concludes that these animals did not neatly fit into preordained categories, thus making them an amalgam, a pollutant that those things that are whole and furthermore, dangerous to the proper organization of society.

Fallers Sullivan, Kevin Lewis O’Neill, and Timothy Gorringe,<sup>8</sup> have traced the colonial and religious origins of racism, the Protestant origins of the prison system in America, or how religion functions within prisons and prison populations, there is too small a stress placed upon the Protestant roots of racism in connection with the mass incarceration of African Americans. It is my hope to add a voice to this nascent conversation within religious studies.<sup>9</sup>

### **-The Mythic Education of White Supremacy-**

The maintenance of a specific population’s mythic status as less than human further crystallizes the security of power for those dominant people in society. I would characterize those dominant in the United States with whiteness and maleness especially.<sup>10</sup> This culturally hegemonic whiteness is derived from a particular ideological narrative or myth that is passed down through generations, and used to exemplify, reify, and identify a dominant world-view. This world-view is than reaffirmed by way of comparison to those who lack power. David Chidester invokes Bruce Lincoln’s notion of myth. Chidester comments that scholarship is no more than myth-making with the authenticating power of the footnote.<sup>11</sup> The scholarly footnote is an interesting and helpful comparison to myth-making. Chidester describes Lincoln’s characterization of myth as, “Power relations, rather than logical relations...Defining myth as

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<sup>8</sup> Sylvester Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500-2000: Colonialism, Democracy and Freedom* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015); David Chidester, *Empire of Religion: Imperialism & Comparative Religion*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2014.); Jennifer Graber, *The Furnace of Affliction: Prisons and Religion in Antebellum America*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, *Prison Religion: Faith-Based Reform and the Constitution*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); Kevin Lewis O’Neill, *Secure the Soul: Christian Piety and Gang Prevention in Guatemala*, (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015); Timothy Gorringe, *God’s Just Vengeance: Crime, Violence and the Rhetoric of Salvation*, (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1996.)

<sup>9</sup> In October of 2013 a conference held at Union Theological Seminar called “Cell Blocks and Border Stops,” wherein religious studies scholars were in attendance. Furthermore, in October of 2014, at University of Syracuse, a group of young religious scholars discussed the particular religious nature of race and mass incarceration.

<sup>10</sup> I want to point out that this paper is severely lacking in analysis pertaining to sex and gender power dynamics within American society and the prison system. A footnote does not do justice to how often women, and African American women are overlooked in research, especially by male authors, which I have unfortunately replicated.

<sup>11</sup> David Chidester, *Empire of Religion: Imperialism & Comparative Religion*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2014.) 277.

ideology in narrative form...which effectively embedded fiction in structural relations of power.”<sup>12</sup> The myth, like the scholarly footnote, provides a sense of authority and authenticity to those benefitting from the power relations. Chidester continues:

As a cultural production of empire, imperial comparative religion combined myth, fiction, and scholarship. Footnotes were crucial to the production, authentication, and circulation of knowledge about religion and religion in imperial comparative religion...Not merely a referencing device, the footnote was an engine of production, a means for extracting raw religious material, mediated by colonial middlemen, into the centralized manufacture of imperial theory.<sup>13</sup>

Myth provides a sense of stability and comfort. This mythic whiteness, developed during the colonial era, offers stability and comfort to those who benefit materially and ideologically from colonialism. Presently, the actualization of this mythic whiteness is the mass incarceration system and could be considered as a form of internal colonialism [the exploitation of workers based upon race or culture by the dominant group within the borders of a nation-state].<sup>14</sup> This mythic narrative maintains dominant power structures, solidifying, reifying, and identifying colonial and capitalist methods as the more effective and progressive world-view. Alternative world-views are seen as regressive or reactionary. However, Chidester notes: “At the same time, footnotes exposed any imperial theory to critique, making it vulnerable to critical disputation over the relation between theory and evidence.”<sup>15</sup> Not only does the footnote or myth have the power to embed ideological narrative into a culture, it is also the point at which one might direct efforts of usurping an embedded ideology. The latter part of this statement being the goal of this essay.

A myth is disseminated through language and its success is contingent upon any number of a particular culture’s tendencies. Generally speaking, for the Greeks and other ancient societies it was the practice of oral story telling. Early Christians effectively utilized literary genres such as gospels and

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<sup>12</sup> Chidester, *Empire of Religion*: 277.

<sup>13</sup> Chidester, *Empire of Religion*, 277.

<sup>14</sup> Refer to Robert Blauner, “Internal Colonialism and Ghetto Revolt,” in, *Social Problems* (Vol.16, No. 4, Spring 1969), 393-408; John R. Chávez, *Beyond Nations: Evolving Homelands in the North Atlantic World, 1400-2000* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Robert Peckham, “Internal Colonialism: Nation and Region in Nineteenth-Century Greece,” in, Maria Todorova, *Balkan Identities: Nation and Memory* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 41-59; David Walls, “Internal Colony or Internal Periphery?” in, *Colonialism in Modern America: The Appalachian Case*, ed. Helen Matthews Lewis, Linda Johnson, and Donald Askins (Booone, NC: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1978); David Walls, “Central Appalachia: A Peripheral Region within an Advanced Capitalist Society,” in, *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* (Vol. 4, No.2, November 1976), 232-246; Pierre van den Berghe, “Education, Class and Ethnicity in Southern Peru: Revolutionary Colonialism,” in *Education and Colonialism: Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Philip G. Altbach and Gail P. Kelly (New York: McKay, 1979).

<sup>15</sup> Chidester, *Empire of Religion*, 278.

epistles to disseminate ideologies. As Hall, Chidester, and Johnson noted, anthropological scholarship and colonial Christian (primarily Protestantism) religions provided an highly effective reaffirmation of European and Christian exceptionalism by labeling African religions as savage, fetish based religions(or lack of religion),<sup>16</sup> and by invoking the Judeo-Christian myth of the curse of Ham to justify the colonization and enslavement of Africans.<sup>17</sup> Contemporarily, It would be safe to say that politicians, and corporate CEOs, those in power benefiting from whiteness do not use Max Muller, E.B. Taylor, or James Frazer to authenticate and sustain their dichotomizing world-view but rather, this dissemination and reification occurs most powerfully in the public school system and the spectacle that is mass media. I will concentrate on public education, though there is much to be said about the power of mass media to create a sense of national unity in the face of racial tensions and subjections based on race.

Richard Merelman notes the importance of education and schooling as the instrument of perpetuating this myth of white supremacy. Merelman offers a case study of how education in public schools has the potential to maintain a white cultural superiority, but also has the potential to liberate black students especially from this educational hegemony. He looks specifically at education in Regency County schools and the potential, but many short comings of attempts to teach a multicultural and black history. He writes, “In the effort to produce and sustain hegemony, over subordinates, dominant groups rely heavily on public schooling. Indeed, public schools constitute a major instrument for the production of what Gramsci calls ‘consent’ to authority.”<sup>18</sup> Merelman continues, “...scholars of all stripes now accept that public schools are normally devoted to creating a sense of national unity that supports the power of dominant groups.”<sup>19</sup> Public education teaches students not to think about who is dominate and why, but rather to fall in line, take orders, and respect the power of the dominate group.

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<sup>16</sup> Refer to, Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500-2000*, ch.2 “On Religious Matters”; David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 12-3, 19, 103-10.

<sup>17</sup> For more information on the use of the curse of Ham, refer to, Theophus H. Smith, *Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations of Black America*, (New York: Oxford Press, 1994.) 86, 124, 236; and, Latta R. Thomas, *Biblical Faith and the Black American*, (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1976) 27-82.

<sup>18</sup> Richard M. Merelman, “Black History and Cultural Empowerment: A Case Study,” in, *American Journal of Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, vol. 101, no.4, 1993), 336.

<sup>19</sup> Merelman, “Black History and Cultural Empowerment” 337.

This is so effective and powerful that mythic whiteness has been able to absorb and insulate itself from usurping challenges, such as the Civil Rights movement. Merelman writes, “...in the case of multiculturalism, absorption might consist of defining multiculturalism as culturally conditioned individual, rather than group, differences. Or absorption might take the form of positing a hypothetical united national community of culturally diverse individuals against a fragmented society of warring racial and ethnic groups.”<sup>20</sup> The powerful hegemonic techniques of erasure, absorption and insulation of history incorporated by whiteness into public education can be witnessed in a 2015 McGraw-Hill geography text book, which literally refers to the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, mind you on a page concerning immigration patterns, as bringing millions of African *workers* to America. On the very same page Europeans are referred to as *indentured servants*. The McGraw-Hill company referred to this as an “editing error.”<sup>21</sup> Another example is the election of President Obama. *Clearly* racism no longer exists in a country that elected an African American president. These are prime examples of whiteness’ ability to, not only absorb counter-discourses and countercultures, but to erase and reformulate history in favor of a more beneficial myth to perpetuate white supremacy. Any victory, it seems, towards equal treatment of African Americans is a pyrrhic one, soon to be absorbed by whiteness.

Resistance to white hegemony becomes apart of and reaffirms mythic white supremacy. Though it is difficult to overcome the this ability to absorb counter-narratives, education, like the footnote, remain a point of resistance and affirmation. J. Brent Crosson describes the pitfalls and merits of resistance in his article concerning Obeah. Crosson describes Obeah, a term commonly used to describe an amalgam of West African witchcraft practiced in the West Indies, as both a religious system and a system of justice, wherein it has the power and potential to be both helpful or harmful: “...colonial discourse does not simply suppress, supplant, or mask the truth of subaltern traditions but also becomes part of their counter discourses on power and moral action. Counter-discourses, as Foucault noted, do not exist outside of the regnant terms of hegemonic discourse but incubate in the instabilities and contradictions of the exercise of power.”<sup>22</sup> To resist and possibly subvert white superiority from its culturally dominant position the

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<sup>20</sup> Merelman, “Black History and Cultural Empowerment” 336.

<sup>21</sup> Laura Isensee, “Why Calling Salves ‘Workers’ is More Than An Editing Error,” [npr.org](http://npr.org). October 23, 2015.

<sup>22</sup> J. Brent Crosson, *Journal of Africana Religions*, “What Obeah Does Do: Healing, Harm, and the Limits of Religion, (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, vol. 3, no. 2, 2015) 166.

resistance must emanate from within the system of power itself. Though, like a stubborn tree stump, one must begin to remove it from the ground by its roots. The question remains, from where did the roots of mythic white supremacy emerge?

Chidester comments on the specific connections between the imperial study of religion and the United States, “Against the background of imperial comparative religion, the problem with these American initiatives in the study of religion was not merely their easy relationship with Protestant theology, their assumptions about liberal ecumenism, or their aspirations for sympathetic interfaith understanding. The central problem in America, as in South Africa, was race.”<sup>23</sup> I agree with Chidester that race and racism *was* the central problem in American study of religion and furthermore, I argue that Protestant theology underpins race as the central problem within American institutions today, ranging from and not limited to, the judicial, educational, and political systems. Any and all examinations of possible religious and cultural data was to stand trial against Protestant conceptions of what is religion and what is culture.

Tisa Wenger, in her analysis of the Pueblo dance controversy in the United States, shows how embedded Protestant grammatology of the term “religion” is in the first amendment. The Pueblo’s attempts to articulate their *traditional* dance rituals and ceremonies as explicitly religious had to fit within the bounds of a Protestant notion of what is religion. In the end however, the Pueblo assimilated and were absorbed by whiteness to retain their own sense of culture. Wenger writes, “To make the case for religious freedom, Indians have had to represent their traditions according to prevailing concepts of what counts as religion [a Euro-American and primarily Protestant notion of religion]. This appears to be a necessary and sometimes successful move within American legal systems, and it has often help engender public sympathy for Indian claims.” Despite the slight success of some of these claims, American whiteness is for the most part unchanged. She continues, “Yet it continues to have its drawbacks. State and Federal courts and government agencies alike tend to uncritically deploy dominate concepts of religion that—despite Indian efforts to challenge and expand them—have lead to judgments against Native Americans in

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<sup>23</sup> Chidester, *Empire of Religion*, 289.

many cases.”<sup>24</sup> In this vein, Weber provides excellent groundwork to uncover these Protestant underpinnings of, not only explicitly religious issues but, as I will argue mass incarceration as well. By examining Weber’s notion of the “spirit of capitalism,” I look to accentuate how the dichotomous essence of this “spirit” is thoroughly embedded in the American popular consciousness and has shaped nearly every institution in America. Furthermore, this “spirit” Weber describes ushers in a banal attitude towards racism in America. Since Weber’s proposed idealism is a response to Marx’s historical materialism, it is necessary for my argument to critique not only Weber, but Marx as well. I rely on Anthony Giddens’ articulation of Marx and Weber. Both these prolific theorists offer different, but in their own way, important pieces to the foundation of mythic white supremacy and banal racism.

### **-Saturated in the Capitalistic Spirit-**

Max Weber’s, *The Protestant Ethic and The “Spirit” of Capitalism*, provides a powerful, though dated, analysis of how modern capitalism came to be, and how it functions so successfully. Weber’s analysis of capitalism stems from his study of agricultural labour in eastern Germany during the nineteenth-century. Similarly to Marx, Weber notes a shift in economic practices with the increasing commercialization of agriculture, which in turn causes conflict between workers and employers (proletariat and bourgeoisie), and alienation between the worker and their work. However, the key difference between Weber and Marx is that Weber does not find a purely economical and material explanation for this shift suitable. Weber proposes that modern capitalism comes from the fact that it is psychological in nature rather than logical. In this sense, the underpinnings of capitalism are ideological in nature, not purely driven by materialism. These psychological and ideological foundations are wrapped within a Protestant religious ethic involving *Beruf* or a vocation/calling and theological predetermination. Anthony Giddens characterizes Weber’s argument as such, “It is crucial to Weber’s analysis that these characteristics[of capitalism] are not ‘logical,’ but ‘psychological’ consequences of the original doctrine

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<sup>24</sup> Tisa Wenger, *We Have Religion: The 1920’s Pueblo Indian Dance Controversy and American Religious Freedom*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina press, 2009), 237.

of predetermination as formulated by Calvin.”<sup>25</sup> The key to unlocking these psychological conditions is showing the effect predetermination theology had and continues to have on modern society. The trick is the reversal from the Catholic notion that good works lead to salvation to the Protestant notion in which salvation leads to good works. Within a theology that dictates some are predestined for salvation while others are destined for eternal damnation, one is lead to believe they are in fact one of the chosen. This in turn leads the individual to do good works to exemplify their being of the elect. Weber describes this shift as *Entzauberung* or disenchantment of the world. No longer can one participate in a *magical* ritual to attain salvation, either you are saved or you are not. This creates an immense psychological strain upon those participating in Protestant, particularly Calvinist, theology.

Giddens examines this psychological phenomena in two parts, “Firstly, that the individual should consider it as obligatory to deem himself one of the chosen: any doubts as to the certainty of election are evidence of imperfect faith and therefore of lack of grace.” A binary is then formed considering for some to be chosen there must be some that are not chosen. This dichotomous relationship is a foundational building block for the endowment of a less-than-humanness. The certainty there are some who will be eternally damned producing a particular fear causing an individual to believe they are chosen. Giddens continues, “Secondly, that ‘intense worldly activity’ is the most appropriate means to develop and maintain this necessary self confidence. Thus the performance of ‘good works’ became regarded as a ‘sign’ of election.”<sup>26</sup> These psychological gymnastics produces in an individual, *Beruf* or [an obligation to work, a calling, or vocation]. Despite their being many sects of Protestantism that influenced modern capitalism, which Weber acknowledges, the essential point to his analysis of Protestant theology is that of the move to remove confession generally. Then, instead of a confessionally driven salvation calculus, there was a precision to an either-or salvation evidenced by the entirety of one’s personhood. This theology provides a powerful rationalization for the modern capitalistic economic enterprise. However, this rationalization stems from Protestant belief, not economic interests as Marx asserted. This was Weber’s foundational critique of Marx.

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<sup>25</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Capitalism & Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim, and Max Weber* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 130.

<sup>26</sup> Giddens, *Capitalism & Modern Social Theory*, 129.

Marx and Engels describe this Protestant theology of vocation as an ideological side effect of material economic shifts during the development of early capitalism. Marx draws on the Feuerbach's critique of Hegelian philosophy. Marx found importance in the idea that even concepts of God and Christian theology are products of societal and material needs. Though Marx critiques Feuerbach's materialism in the sense that religion is not a product of human perceptions and objects, but rather human *Praxis*. Giddens summarizes and explains the consequences derived from a quote found in volume one of Marx's *Selected Works*, "...consciousness is rooted in human *Praxis*, which is in turn social. This is the sense of the statement, 'It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.'" Giddens continues to describe why neither materialism nor idealism alone can describe the effects of capitalism,

...this [Marx's materialism] neglects altogether the fact that there is not a unilateral relationship between values and power: the dominate class is able to disseminate ideas which are legitimations of its position of dominance. Thus the ideas of freedom and equality which come to the fore in bourgeois society cannot be taken at their 'face value', as directly summing up social reality[as Marx insists]; on the contrary, the legal freedoms which exist in bourgeois society actually serve to legitimize the reality of contractual obligations in which propertyless wage-labour is heavily disadvantaged as compared to the owners of capital. The import of this is that ideology must be studied in relation to the social relationships in which it is embedded: we must study both the concrete process which give rise to various types of ideas, together with the factors which determine which ideas come into prominence within a given society.<sup>27</sup>

To actually describe how a particular cultural acquired power, Giddens is suggesting here that, in Marxist terminology, the substructure does not shape and manipulate the superstructure or vice-versa<sup>28</sup>; but rather these notions reciprocally determine on another. Weber, in his critique of Marx, attempts to provide a structuralism that describes a reciprocal relationship between sub and superstructure. However, by doing so Weber does stress the trait of *charisma* to explain the foundations of this social system. By rejecting Marx's asymmetrical relations between class interests and ideology Weber does end up relying heavily upon abstract principles behind empirical phenomena.

Despite this reliance on abstraction, I find that Weber sets the stage for articulating the religious underbelly of capitalist practices and eventually mass incarceration with his notion of the Protestant ethic and "spirit of capitalism." The conditions leading to the obligatory calling lays the groundwork,

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<sup>27</sup> Giddens, *Capitalism & Modern Social Theory*, 41.

<sup>28</sup> Superstructure meaning the dominate ethos of any given time, and the substructure being that of human *praxis* and material and economic relations.

theological and then economically, for particular groups or individuals to be graced with humanity and salvation, while another particular group is damned with *Untermenschlichkeit* [less-than-human-humanity]. The doctrine of predetermination is the primary building block for the enterprise of colonialism and modern capitalism. Weber, in response to a series of harsh criticisms of his *Protestant Ethic* from Felix Rachahl, describes how a Native American trader, who has monetary success, might make sense of his success within Weber's ideology. Weber, much in line with the times, dictates that the Native American, because of his success, has clearly atoned for his otherwise *usurarua pravitas* [moral perversion]. Weber's apparent racism exemplifies how powerful the rational of predestination is in that he too is effected by this ideology that leads to less than ideal material outcomes for particular groups, such as Native Americans and African Americans. He writes, "...God had a purpose in selecting precisely *him* for economic advancement and had equipped him with the means to achieve it—in contrast to others, whom for good, if imponderable, reasons he had destined to suffer poverty and hard toil."<sup>29</sup> If this is the predominate world view of Europe and then the United States, one can see how simple it was to justify the colonization of the Americas and Africa. Clearly those who are in contention of being colonized are in disfavor with God and are predetermined to suffer eternal damnation shown by their material state of "poverty and hard toil." This circular logic is a crucial component to the justification of colonization and eventually chattel slavery. Even Weber himself falls prey to his own *critique* or really description of this colonial capitalistic spirit.

It this dichotomous spirit that opens the gates for the justification of specific populations to not benefit from the constitutional protections of sovereignty. Basically, if a population could be enslaved and was enslaved it was God's will. The material conditions of slavery represented materially the election of damnation. This material representation of God's will outweighed any political guarantees of freedom and further solidifies white supremacy. The notion of sovereignty is flawed to begin with if who is truly sovereign or not is dictated by the material conditions of any particular individual or collective. Scholars Orlando Patterson and Sylvester Johnson illustrate how words such as "freedom" and "democracy" have

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<sup>29</sup> Max Weber, "A Final Rebuttal of Rachahl's Critique of the "Spirit of Capitalism," *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism and Other Writings*, trans. & ed. Peter Baehr & Gordon C. Wells (New York: Penguin Books, 2002) 312.

been used and manipulated by dominate and subordinate groups to accomplish or suppress particular political goals.<sup>30</sup> Though each of these scholars situates their work in particular and differing historical contexts, they examine the effects these concepts have on material phenomena and ideologies. These effects point towards successful colonial nation-states to bestow particular groups as less than human in order to build and maintain its colonial empire, internally or externally. When those who are dominant in a society view target groups of people as less than human, it paves the road to domination, colonization, enslavement, and imprisonment. Patterson highlights the underpinnings of the Weberian “spirit of capitalism” in his examination of freedom. The ideology of freedom was born from the dialectic: master and slave. One might compare this dialectic to a similar dialectic relationship between those who are elect for salvation and those who are damned. If one accepts these relationships one will see that the notion of freedom is doomed. The core value of freedom (especially as it is articulated in the United States Constitution, Preamble and Declaration of Independence) is thus contradictory to itself, for if some are to be free than some most not be free. In other words, “We the People” is not “all the people.”

The United States, saturated in the “capitalistic spirit,” has consistently used the term “all” with the implicit understanding that “all” does not include all bodies, specifically black bodies. For some to be free, others must be shackled. Patterson writes, “People came to value freedom, to construct it as a powerful shared vision of life, as a result of their experience of, and response to, slavery...in their role as masters, slaves, and non-salves.”<sup>31</sup> Freedom cannot exist without slavery, or non-freedom. I use the term non-freedom to denote that, though explicit forms of slavery do not widely exist in contemporary United States, there are still implicit forms of slavery which are alive and well, i.e. mass incarceration. Patterson describes how and why freedom is constructed as a supreme value in the western world. In doing so, he parses freedom into three coterminous categories: personal, sovereign and civic freedoms. He describes the relationship metaphorically as a musical chord in which the chordal value of freedom appears

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<sup>30</sup> Particularly in their works: *Freedom: Freedom in the Making of Western Culture and African American Religions, 1500-2000: Colonialism, Democracy, and Freedom* respectively.

<sup>31</sup> Orlando Patterson, *Freedom: Freedom in the Making of Western Culture*, (US: Basic Books, 1991) xiii.

ideologically harmonious, yet in reality is materially dissonant.<sup>32</sup> Sylvester Johnson further historicizes and complicates the relationship between freedom, slavery, and democracy by characterizing differing African American responses to white colonialism. In doing so, he also highlights the material actualizations of Du Bois' double-consciousness.

One the one hand, Johnson portrays the binaries between slave, master, colonizer, and colonized as one in which both parties are deeply devoted to freedom and democracy. Johnson describes the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) or the Americo-Liberian democracy responses to white supremacy as ones which grasps and utilizes hegemonic values. Johnson exemplifies Garveyism to this point, "Garvey desired to harness this capacity of empire to inaugurate a Black empire -state that might hold its own against Western colonial hegemony...His ambitions of colonizing Africa and creating a continental Black state easily function as evidence that he was not seriously committed to Black freedom."<sup>33</sup> Similarly, the formation of Liberia employed colonial tactics to dominate sovereign African natives in order for a few African Americans to emigrate from the United States and obtain their own sovereignty from the United States. Colonial values are so embedded in modern society that many of those oppressed by these values end up using the same values for their own benefit.

Under the instruction of a host of white ministers from different Protestant congregations and the American Colonization Society (ACS), members of the Black Christian Alliance were able to more or less successfully and ironically colonize Liberia and Sierra Leone. Johnson describes the necessary for this conquest and colonization,

That conquest grounded a political economy operating under the sign of freedom to achieve self-determination from a population who had been stateless in the US republic. It is crucial to understand that this sign of freedom was no misnomer; it was not hypocrisy. The Liberia and Sierra Leone colonies were in every sense of the same genus as the White settler colonies in the

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<sup>32</sup> Patterson, *Freedom*, 3-5. Personal freedom is a freedom to do as one desires basically limited only by another's will to do the same. Sovereign freedom emerges in the West in conjunction with personal freedom, and is described as the will to "do what one pleases, *insofar as one can*." This in turn leads to control and domination over others wills. Finally, civic freedom is "the capacity of adult members of a community to participate in its life and governance." In a sense, freedom to do what one pleases limited by the particular rights and regulations of a community. Patterson describes in a vast historical analysis how the conviction of the value in freedom has been the driving force behind colonial and domination enterprises.

<sup>33</sup> Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500-2000: Colonialism, Democracy and Freedom*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015) 402.

Americas and southern Africa...it is no accident, thus, that the settler colony of Liberia bore the hallmarks of democracy birthed in the Atlantic world of slavery, genocide, and brutal conquest.<sup>34</sup>

The Americo-Liberian democracy far more so than Garvey, despite his colonial tendencies, was awarded the favor and assistance of white(ness) society due to their adoption of dominant paradigms of freedom, democracy, racial governance and importantly, as Johnson points out, Christianity.<sup>35</sup>

On the other hand, African American responses to this colonial Christian matrix that opposed and critiqued hegemonic manifestations of whiteness, freedom, and democracy were vilified by white society. The vilification and intense scrutiny by United States counterintelligence agencies of Black Liberation movements rivaled that of the communist Red Scare beginning after World War I, and further intensified with the onset of the Cold War and throughout the 1970's. Johnson associates these "Black Power" and anti-colonialism movements with a Nietzschean *ressentiment* [the acknowledgment that ones inferiority or failure is not the fault of oneself, but rather the fault of an exterior power]. This "Black Politic" represented a direct rejection of embedded white value systems. He writes, "This Black politics is imagined as holding no truck with the dealings of political domination... *imperium* is for Whites; Blacks should exercise righteousness not rule, morality not might, piety not power."<sup>36</sup> By adopting values contrary to those subsumed by whiteness, these particular movements<sup>37</sup> and their leaders<sup>38</sup> were deemed as public enemies and treated as such by the FBI, CIA, and police departments nationwide.<sup>39</sup> Despite the ideological differences between the "Black Power" movement and the National Committee of Black Churchmen (NCBC), these groups associations with, respectively, Islam and violence or communism<sup>40</sup> and non-violence were both damned. These two sides of the Civil Rights Movement *fought* for the returning of humanity to African Americans; to obtain the supposed rights awarded to every American

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<sup>34</sup> Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500-2000*, 206.

<sup>35</sup> Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500-2000*, 7. Johnson argues racial governance and Christianity were "absolutely central" to both African American settlers and the US settler state. However, Garvey, despite his colonial tactics, was deemed dangerous due to his supposed demagogic. (379)

<sup>36</sup> Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500-2000*, 402.

<sup>37</sup> The Black Panther Party (BPP), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Student Non-Violence Coordinating Committee (SNCC)

<sup>38</sup> Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Malik Shabazz (Malcolm X), and Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael)

<sup>39</sup> Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500-2000*, 325-395. In chapters: 7 and 8, Johnson goes into great detail about the historical context pertaining to the creation and damnation of Black Liberation groups and Civil Rights Movement.

<sup>40</sup> Groups like the SNCC often went to Cuba and witnessed the possible long term benefits of Castro's communist society. Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500-2000*, 367-69.

citizen. However, the humanity they sought did not coincide with the *humanity* offered to them, which was instead a *less-than-human-humanity*.

When a group is objectified as alien, an other, or less than human, it is a far simpler task for the dominant powers that be to deny basic human rights articulated in democratic constitutions. Furthermore, these opposing responses represent the pitfalls of double-consciousness. African Americans either become overtly white and repeat the devastating effects of whiteness and colonialism, like Garvey; or are too African and are thus deemed dangerous and vilified, like Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. However, no matter which response to whiteness is enacted, African American's still do not fit the whiteness mold. African Americans, as an entirety, are still represented by blackness and thus marginalized. Manning Marable articulates the actual material condition of marginalization of African Americans, "The Black domestic periphery in America is essentially imprisoned behind the walls of poverty, sexism, unemployment and workplace exploitation. Sometimes the barriers to freedom seem very real, as we observe a police assault against a random Black victim. At other moments they seem quite abstract."<sup>41</sup> Continuing to uncover whiteness as the manipulation of humanity, freedom and democracy to promulgated, within a dichotomous mythic framework, what is *best* for the dominate group within a national or global culture no matter what the costs, is to begin to rip out the roots of the stubborn white supremacy tree. To rip out these roots is the first step in removing the dichotomizing whiteness and replace that world-view with one of acceptance and equality. It is to revel in and celebrate differences rather than utilize difference to dominate peripheric populations. Unfortunately, hegemonic ideological whiteness is still the dominant world-view in the United States, allowing for a banality of racism and mass incarceration of African Americans.

### **-That Hideous Strength of Banality: Slavery to Mass Incarceration-**

The history of the Trans-Atlantic begins in the 1440's in West Africa with the rise of Afro-European mercantilism. It was not long after the first wandering European explorers landed on the shores

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<sup>41</sup> Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Back America*. 94.

of West Africa that the first of many slave castles, Elmina Castle, was commissioned to be built by Portuguese ruler Joao II in 1482. First, the castle was built on the European lust for gold and hopes of a brilliant Christian empire in Africa, but shortly after Europeans discovered the already thriving slave trade in Africa human trafficking became the main focus of Afro-European mercantilism. Though this new mercantilism began as profitable for both African and European traders, it soon became the one of if not the largest and most abysmal displacements of any group of people. From around 1400 to 1800, Johnson states that, “This unprecedented volume of trade culminated in the deaths of between 50 to 100 million Africans and the removal of up to 14 million peoples from Africa.”<sup>42</sup> Not only was the amount of people displaced and killed unprecedented, but so too was the acquisition of wealth.

Johnson continues to explain the essential connection between this new form of capital and Protestantism. It was the British who took, what I have described as whiteness, to its logical extreme and laid the foundation for hegemonic treatment of Africans in the United States. Johnson, describing the British empire writes,

First, the empire was a self-consciously Protestant one. In the prejudicial parlance of Reformed ideology, the ‘benighted heathens’ in the Americas could be left to neither the spiritual darkness of paganism nor the ‘error’ of Romanism. In their efforts to control territories, the last thing the British monarchs desired was more Catholic converts, whether of Native American, African, or European provenance. Second, expanding Christendom was inextricably wed to global, commercial conquest.<sup>43</sup>

It is not to large of a leap here to consider what Johnson describes as the embodiment of “capitalist spirit.” The circular logic behind predetermination theology justified these methods for the acquisition of wealth because the acquisition of wealth meant that not only were you in the favor of God, but that you were part of the elect meant for salvation. This rational became all the more potent when those that the British encountered did not appear to have religion or at least a primitive form of religion (fetishism) as compared to what the Europeans considered religion. It is this dichotomous stand point that exemplifies whiteness and its unique relationship to Weberian Protestant capitalism. Carla Pestana, in her work expressing the connection between Protestantism and colonial empire, illustrates this notion as follows: “...European Christians interpreted the religions they encountered in terms of this pagan-Christian

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<sup>42</sup> Johnson, *African American Religion, 1500-2000*, 25.

<sup>43</sup> Johnson, *African American Religion, 1500-2000*, 39-40.

dichotomy. Whereas non-Islamic Africans or Native Americans might be open to the prospect of learning from carriers of a strange belief system, Christians were inclined to understand this difference as error.”<sup>44</sup> This Protestant dichotomous world-view fueled the British conquest throughout the Atlantic world, Ireland, and eventually America.

British settlers, fleeing religious persecution in England and seeking new economic ventures, gained independence from England in 1776 to persecute whom they saw fit. The new found America citizens saw little need to alter an already well oiled colonial machine, Pestana postulates how Americans would continue to use this religious model for economic success, “Residents of the United States would employ models developed at the imperial center during the colonial period, creating their own missionary organizations to serve within and eventually beyond their own borders.”<sup>45</sup> Moreover, despite any successful conversions of those dominated, economic success was still the predominate sign that one was in the favor of God. Christian or not, blacks and Native Americas were still considered dangerous by the dominate class and would also fine themselves on the wrong side of this dichotomy. Thus, the United States was born. A country founded upon life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness by fighting against the mythic notion of taxation without representation was now *free* to accumulate their own wealth in a booming industrial revolution and Britain's ever increasing demand for cotton. Global markets were highly competitive and chattel slavery was the perfect solution to guarantee God's will of salvation upon the dominate class in America. Slave labour meant an extremely low overhead and solidified America's place as a global economic power. By the time of the Civil War, the American South was producing far more cotton than any other modern nation-state. In fact, American produced nearly one billion pounds of cotton per year almost two-thirds of the worlds supply. Even upon the abolition of slavery, sharecropping and Jim Crow laws were the perfect solutions to maintaining low overhead costs of cotton farming and continued global economic prosperity.<sup>46</sup> Sylvester Johnson so eloquently states, “Atlantic slavery was at

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<sup>44</sup> Carla Gardina Pestana, *Protestant Empire: Religion and the Making of the British Atlantic World* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009) 30.

<sup>45</sup> Pestana, *Protestant Empire*, 261.

<sup>46</sup> Pietra Rivoli, *The Travels of A T-Shirt in the Global Economy: An Economist Examines the Market, Power, and Politics of World Trade*. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons inc., 2009) 11. For a more in-depth look at the birth of the cotton industry in the United States refer to Rivoli's first section of this book entitled, “Cotton King.”

the center of the Atlantic empires throughout which emerged White settler states, finance capitalism, and liberal democracies.”<sup>47</sup>

Upon the Northern victory of the Civil War, the 13th and 14th amendments were set in place and the abolition of slavery was felt nation-wide. However, as W. E. B. Du Bois described, “The slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again towards slavery.”<sup>48</sup> The abolition of slavery was a brief step in the right direction, yet by no means the end of mythic whiteness in America. Blackness was still dangerous and needed to be controlled. Stephen Berrey conveys, in his work about race relations in Mississippi during the 1930’s through 60’s, the affects of the physical performances acted out between blacks and whites and the different narratives told by blacks and whites. White narratives imposed characteristics of blackness such as dangerous, lazy, and stupidity to reify the necessity of segregation; whereas black narratives looked to exemplify and make visible the violent lynchings committed by whites against blacks, and furthermore the necessity for African Americans to militarize. Though not every individual black or white played into these roles, these were the structural sentiments of either side of black-white dichotomy. Berrey concludes that the ideological narrative side of his analysis was far more effective, especially for whites. Most importantly of these characteristics delivered through narrative was the criminality of blackness. Berrey describes that despite the few white individuals who noted the problematic nature of connecting criminality with blackness they still upheld traditional race relations, “...if white officials devoted scant attention to alleviating black crime, the narratives they constructed around it did important work for Jim Crow, serving to extend the performative roles that positioned blacks as servants and whites as merciful paternalists.”<sup>49</sup> White writers seemed to have difficulty exemplifying the actual terrifying characteristics of whiteness.

Khalil Muhammad picks up on this notion as well in his work. *The Condemnation of Blackness*, where he uncovers how perceived inferior and dangerous races which threaten white Protestant superiority, such as the Irish and Italians, were able to shed notions of criminality and danger while African Americans were not. Muhammed describes that black criminality was not only a tool to absorb

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<sup>47</sup> Johnson, *African American Religion, 1500-2000*, 5.

<sup>48</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co. 1935.)

<sup>49</sup> Stephen A. Berrey, *The Jim Crow Routine: Everyday Performance of Race, Civil Rights, and Segregation in Mississippi*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015) 79

the shameful history of slavery and Jim Crow into whiteness and protect whites against accusations of racism, but also to support discriminatory public education and welfare polices. The ‘black criminal’ narrative was so successful that despite even after claims of blackness as biologically criminal were refuted by black and white scholars alike, black criminality moved from the biological realm to the cultural realm. He writes,

In effect, they [white liberals] incriminated black culture. Attempts to deemphasize blackness and provide social welfare for African Americans never matched the scale or intensity of the Americanization project among immigrants. The racial-cultural content of white ethnic criminality gradually began to lose its currency during the Progressive Era, while black criminality became more visible (and more contested by black).<sup>50</sup>

Muhammed argues that the greater attention by white scholars to overt southern racism silenced the unequal treatment of African Americans within the justice system, welfare polices, and education nation wide, and especially in large urban areas such as Chicago. Despite the testimony of judges and police officers that black criminals were treated far differently than white criminals and despite ever growing research and addition statistics articulating the folly that was the connectivity between blacks and crime, African American’s continued to be arrested and incarcerated at an ever increasing rate.<sup>51</sup> There remained a serious failure to recognize the imposition of danger on blackness by white dominate society, or what Muhammad refers to as the ‘condemnation of blackness.’ Criminal statistics were another tool used to maintain white hegemony. On one end, crime statist were used to lift impoverished immigrants and native whites out of the category of dangerous and into the whiteness fold. On the other end, the same statist were used to reflect and reinforce the dangerous nature of diasporic Africans, keeping African Americas as the enemy of a white America. Notions of humanity and freedom were used to insulate white history and white culture once again.

Muhammad emphasizes that regardless of black Civil Rights activists attempts to highlight the actual qualities of whiteness and to “police the criminal justice system” their effects were absorbed into whiteness, “...paradoxically the antiracist rhetoric of civil rights activists contributed to sharpening the differences in how others viewed blacks’ relationship to crime and policing compared to how they viewed

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<sup>50</sup> Khalil Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and The Making of Modern Urban America*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010,) 9.

<sup>51</sup> Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness*, 240-1.

nearly every other group.”<sup>52</sup> While Muhammad argues for the silence and covert racism surrounding how much black criminality created the modern urban northern United States, Berrey describes the far more overt connection between blackness and criminality in the southern United States, “Following the 1954 *Brown* decision deeming segregation schools unconstitutional, legislatures across the South passed more than 450 laws related to segregation, including measures to prevent or limit school integration, as well as more extreme efforts.”<sup>53</sup> Michelle Alexander demonstrates the Southern backlash against the *Brown v Board of Education* decision, “The Ku Klux Klan reasserted itself as a powerful terrorist organization, committing castrations, killings, and the bombing of black homes and churches. NAACP leaders were beaten, pistol-whipped, and shot.”<sup>54</sup> It would not be until the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights act of 1965 that African Americans would have another moment in the sun, brief as it was.

During this time, President Kennedy was a strong advocate for the equality of rights for African Americans, yet due to his assassination it is impossible to know the possibilities of what could have come out of his presidency for the equalization of African Americans nation-wide. Jim Crow may have died with the Civil Rights movement, but what took its place was the age of a colorblindness and mass incarceration, or what Michelle Alexander refers to as ‘The New Jim Crow.’ As I have argued, throughout the history of the United States, freedom, democracy, and humanity have been the twisted foundations to systems of oppression, which deem particular groups as *Untermenschlichkeit*. While some groups are able to shed these connotations, African Americans remain under the panoptic lens of classification. Institutions such as chattel slavery, Jim Crow laws, and mass incarceration, have been (and some continue to be) completely legal. These racially oriented system of oppression are deeply rooted in the “spirit of capitalism.” With the absorption of the Civil Rights movement into what whites refer to as a ‘post-racial society,’ this powerful mythic whiteness has successfully taken a banal attitude towards racism in the United States. The banality of racism is incredibly damaging (due to its more or less unintentional and invisible nature) to marginal populations. Racism is not (and has never been) an individualized problem in the United States, but rather has always been a problem at a structural level.

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<sup>52</sup> Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness*, 274.

<sup>53</sup> Berrey, *The Jim Crow Routine*, 142.

<sup>54</sup> Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 37.

Derrick Bell makes explicit the structural banality of racism in his narrative, “Space Traders.”<sup>55</sup> In the story, aliens offer the United States enough gold to bail out the nearly bankrupt federal, state, and local governments, chemicals capable of eradicating pollution, and safe nuclear engines and fuel to relieve the reliance on fossil fuels all in exchange for all the people considered to be black in the United States. In the end of the story the United States government goes through with the exchange, representative of the continual oppression of blacks by whites under the guise of modern economic and social *progress*. The end of the narrative is truly damning; however, the more disturbing notion found in the narrative is that the trade itself was even considered as a viable option. In this sense, I am not completely referring to the characters in the story, but rather those reading the narrative may too have considered the possibly. Charles Mills elaborates on this notion by considering structural racism as an implicit contract, similar in a sense to Rousseau’s *Social Contract*. The *Racial Contract* is a critique and subversion of the popular Enlightenment concept of the social contract used by Locke, Rousseau, Hobbes, and many European and American social-political philosophers and political leaders. Mills outlines an implicit contract between the dominate race or whites over non-whites that upholds racialized political, moral, and epistemological systems. He describes the racial contract as an “exploitation contract that creates global European economic domination and national white racial privilege.”<sup>56</sup> The *Racial Contract* is hegemony at its finest. Invoking Pierre van den Berghe’s notion of *Herrenvolk Demokratie* [a governmental democracy in which an ethnic majority holds all the power, and minority ethnicities are disenfranchised],<sup>57</sup> Mills explains that *Herrenvolk* democracy embodies the democracy of the United States. Mills continues, “[this] illuminating phrase...describe(s) these [european imperial] polities, which captures perfectly the dichotomization of the Racial Contract.”<sup>58</sup>

Michelle Alexander identifies the extend to which the United States currently functions as a *Herrenvolk Demokratie*. In the United States, black criminals are being created to sustain the exercise and

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<sup>55</sup> Derrick Bell, “The Power of Narrative” in *Legal Studies Forum* (Vol. 23 p. 315-348, 1999).

<sup>56</sup> Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997) 31. In a sense a contract into modernity.

<sup>57</sup> Refer to Pierre van den Berghe, *Race and Racism: A Comparative Study*. (New York: Wiley, 1978)

<sup>58</sup> Mills, *The Racial Contract*, 29.

maximizing the power of white racial privilege.<sup>59</sup> Alexander characterizes the phenomenon of mass incarceration and structural racism as such,

Today, no less than fifty years ago, a flawed public consensus lies at the core of the prevailing caste system. When people think about crime, especially drug crime, they do not think about suburban housewives violating laws regulating prescription drugs or white frat boys using ecstasy. Drug crime in this country is understood to be black and brown, and it is *because* drug crime is racially defined in the public consciousness that the electorate has not cared much what happens to drug criminals—at least not the way they would have cared if the criminals were understood to be white. It is this failure to care, really care across color lines, that, lies at the core of this system of control and every racial caste system that has existed in the United States...<sup>60</sup>

Alexander elaborates in great deal the historical, social-political actions which lead from chattel slavery, to the Jim Crow laws, to the current mass incarceration system. Among the key factors involved in the creation and continuation of a racial caste system or racial contract in the United States is coded language. This language is used to sustain the mythic, panoptic ideology that whiteness is pure and blackness is indeed dangerous trickles down through public education and mass media. “Welfare Queens” or “predators” along with other *colorblind* rhetoric developed by the Reagan administration’s return to *family values* reifies white supremacy without overtly calling attention to race. These *family values* are clearly coded language for white Protestant values. Though I think Alexander misses a key aspect in the fostering of the mass incarceration system, wherein she elevates Lindon B. Johnson’s War against Crime<sup>61</sup>, she fails to notice the important code word Muhammad is keen to, “poverty,” and L.B.J’s War on Poverty.<sup>62</sup> These code words perpetuate the connectivity between black and dangerous and furthermore, where overt racism is now more difficult to find in society, these words ushered in a banal racism.

The use of “race-neutral” language to uphold dominate racial power structures is still rampant throughout the United States in areas such as but not inclusive to: the defunded of affirmative action, relieving prison overpopulation, and police acts of racial violence.<sup>63</sup> These language games have convinced many that the Civil-Rights movement was successful in usurping racial hegemony by

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<sup>59</sup> Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 224.

<sup>60</sup> Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 222.

<sup>61</sup> Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 38-39.

<sup>62</sup> Not only should one refer to Khalil Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness*, ch.3, “Incriminating Culture: The Limits of Racial Liberalism in the Progressive Era.” But also refer to the up and coming work of: Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to The War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016)

<sup>63</sup> Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 47-8.

describing the United States as *post-racial* or *colorblind*. This color-blind rhetoric desperately insisted that racism is an individualized and behavioral problem and institutions of law and education were color-blind allowing equal opportunity for all those qualified. In turn, racially based programs or initiatives such as affirmative action are seen as, *unfair* to whites. It would appear then, that the majority of racism is not directly malicious, but normalized and banal. Alexander's comment on a "failure to care" speaks volumes towards a banality of racism. Racism is so coded into the public consciousness that many people do not even recognize or care to recognize the terrible "spirit" of oppression continuing to haunt the Untied States. Similar to Hannah Arendt's notion of the banality of evil, this racial banality infects American culture and individual persons, and upholds dominant mythic whiteness.

## **-Conclusion-**

While narrating and analyzing Adolf Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem, Arendt makes the insightful point that there was a true lack of caring and a banality towards the violence enacted upon Jews and other marginalized groups in Nazi Germany. Heinrich Himmler, commander of the SS and one of the most responsible administrators of the Holocaust, describes how a transition from empathy to a banality towards evil was achieved. Ardent dictates Himmler's solution,

...the problem was how to overcome not so much their conscience as the animal pity by which all normal men are affected in the presence of physical suffering. The trick...was very simple and probably very effective; it consisted in turning these instincts [empathy] around, as it were, in directing them toward the self. So that instead of saying: What horrible things I did to people!, the murderers would be able to say: What horrible things I had to watch in the pursuance of my duties, how heavily the task weighed upon my shoulders!<sup>64</sup>

African Americans and other marginalized groups in the United States face heavy forms of oppression dictated by the *Racial Contract*, which is now dangerously covert. People may not currently be shipped on trains to ghettos, concentration camps, or gas chambers; however, there is an eery similarity between African Americans being *shipped* to particular neighborhoods and African Americas populating prisons at an alarming rate. Alexander describes the *war on drugs* and the *school to prison pipeline* as the key

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<sup>64</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Banality of Evil* (1963), 106.

component of oppression.<sup>65</sup> This pipeline funnels black individuals from class rooms, to prison cells, to become labeled as a felon and second class citizen endowing them throughly with a *less-than-human-humanity*. The parallelism between the banality of evil in Nazi Germany and the most current manifestation of racial crisis occurring across the United States is stifling. It was one's duty in Nazi Germany to uphold a radical racial contract by stepping into line and allow for a blinding banality to shield one from the horrible atrocities that occurred regularly. The banality of evil and the banality of racism ensures that one does not break the *Racial Contract*, and panoptic modern machine continues securing and ensuring white dominance.

However whereas colorblindness perpetuates the normalization of racism and maintains the *Racial Contract* through invisibility, an attempt to make race and the properties of whiteness visible would be a step towards breaking the *Racial Contract*. One ought to exemplify how hegemonic impositions upon blackness are complete and utter folly seated in deep Protestant roots. In Peggy McInosth's article, "White Privilege and Male Privilege," she describes how whites are taught to ignore their privilege and consider their worldview as the norm. She writes,

whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege ... about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious ... My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor ... [A] pattern of assumptions that were passed on to me as a white person ... I was taught to recognize racism only in individual moral will.<sup>66</sup>

Curriculums are not only saturated in whiteness, but maleness and heterosexuality as well. This modern Euro-male-centrism, which encompasses curriculums across the country, perpetuates the normative criteria to which all other identities are compared. This being said, identities which are not comprised of male and white are immediately recognized as an other and given, in a sense, a *yellow badge*. On the other hand, whiteness, especially combined with maleness, is the invisible norm. People see the physical differences between "races" which further crystallizing the naturalization of race as metaphysically necessarily rather than contingent. The act of *seeing* is essential to the formation of categories and classifications. It is far easier to see overt individualized racism on the news than the abstract concept of

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<sup>65</sup> Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 58-94.

<sup>66</sup> Peggy McInosth, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies," in, *Race, Class, and Gender: An Anthology*, ed. M. Andersen & P. H. Collins (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1992) 71, 77.

structural racism in politics, morality, and epistemology. To see the structural side of racism, we must have a society see the properties of whiteness. In this sense, quantitative and qualitative data, as I have presented, should be used to make structural racism visible to the person endowed with whiteness.

In conclusion, I want to consider the story and actions of Geoffrey Canada. Paul Tough chronicles the life changing work Geoffrey Canada and his quest to uplift the lives of many African American children and their families in Harlem, New York. Canada created the Harlem Children's Zone in which he sought to divert the school to prison pipeline to a school to school conveyor belt. Despite the encouraging *statistics* in Tough's new afterward; I can't help but notice the cover of the book. It is covered with young gleeful African American children, yet towering over them stands Canada with a solemn face and empty stare. It is the work like Geoffrey Canada and others like him that will continue to change America for the better. However, Tough's writing is saturated in whiteness as he centers his argument around poverty as do many white authors when discussing issues of inequality. The dissemination of a book like this is banal racist at work, subtly maintaining a much quieter white hegemony.<sup>67</sup> That being said, I think revolution is out of the question, but rather history shows that society is slow to change and the destruction of racist mentalities embedded deep within our global modern society is like the slow crash of waves against a rock face. Day by day a little more of the racist rock is washed away. There is a word for this in German, *Naturlangsamkeit*, which means the [painful] slowness of natural development. I would suggest further that it is a *mühsame Naturlangsamkeit [the Arduous and painful slowness of nature.]*

-The Supremacy of white values is stated with such violence, the victorious confrontation of these values with the lifestyle and beliefs of the colonized is so impregnated with aggressiveness, that as a counter measure the colonized rightfully make a mockery of them whenever they are mentioned. In the colonial context the colonist only quits undermining the colonized once the latter have proclaimed loud and clear that white values reign supreme. In the period of decolonization the colonized masses thumb their noses at these very values, shower them with insults and vomit them up.-

—Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

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<sup>67</sup> Paul Tough, *Whatever It Takes: Geoffrey Canada's Quest to Change Harlem and America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008.)

