"My Poor Soul": Theodicy and the Strong Assimilationist Origin of Black American Philosophy

Tony Baugh
University of Edinburgh

Abstract

The following essay engages with the assimilationist proto-theodicy articulated by Magdalena Beulah Brockden, an enslaved African woman in the eighteenth century, as recounted in Seth Moglen's article, "Enslaved in the City on a Hill: The Archive of Moravian Slavery and the Practical Past." While Moglen's analysis foregrounds narrative as a genre within the corpus of slave literature, my inquiry centers on interpreting Brockden's *Lebenslauf*, her memoir of Christian conversion, as a theodicy, a complex philosophical meditation on religion and politics. In addition, this essay undertakes a critical exegesis of C. L. R. James's *State Capitalism and World Revolution*, focusing particularly on the concluding chapter, "Philosophy and State Capitalism." In this section, James identifies rationalism and idealism as paradigmatic philosophies of subordination and managerial control, precisely because they misconstrue materialism, a similar pitfall of Brockden's ontologically assimilationist theodicy.

Introduction

This essay advances a historical and philosophical claim about the origins of Black American thought. It argues that Magdalena Beulah Brockden's *Lebenslauf*—a Moravian spiritual autobiography authored by this enslaved Black woman in eighteenth-century Pennsylvania—constitutes the earliest *published* work of Black American philosophy. I read Brockden's brief testimony as a proto-theodicy of strong (ontological) assimilationism: an epistemic and spiritual posture in which theological rationalization absorbs the subject's being into the dominant ecclesial-imperial order. In Brockden's narrative, inward certitude and ecclesial mediation confer truth and moral standing,

while the material determinants of bondage and extraction are rendered spiritually indifferent. Such theodicy, I contend, inaugurates a consequential current in Black intellectual history, one that normalizes domination by translating suffering into providential meaning, thereby disciplining the soul and foreclosing liberationist politics. In this sense, the text models a philosophy of religion whose practical effects align with imperial rule and statist economization; its grammar is anti-liberationist, and, insofar as it ratifies racialized hierarchy, anti-Black and anti-democratic**.**

Two clarifications prepare the ground for this argument. First, by *Lebenslauf* I refer to the Moravian genre of spiritual life narrative that was composed, edited, and circulated within the church, often read at a congregant's death. The *Lebenslauf* is not a transparent window onto an individual interiority but a doctrinally shaped auto-narrative, one that codifies key tropes—obedience, submission, affective union with Christ, and providential ordering. God's providence is a cornerstone of Black American theodicy, and it is articulated through multiple perspectives. Second, by "strong (ontological) assimilationism" I distinguish a deep identificatory stance from strategic or pragmatic accommodation. Strong assimilationism involves reconstituting personhood, through its truth, value, and intelligibility, inside the dominant spiritual-political frame; what counts as knowledge, virtue, and hope is measured against that frame. In Brockden's case, the grammar of sanctification not only *interprets* enslavement but redeems it as spiritual vocation, thus de-materializing exploitation and rendering critique impious. This is the rationalist/immaterialist quotient of the text: its elevation of inward, ecclesially ratified certainty over analysis of social causality.

Methodologically, the essay integrates three moves. First, drawing on Cornel West's typology of Black intellectual traditions, I position Brockden's testimony as a counter-pole to prophetic, liberationist Christianity. West's map helps name the tension between spiritual rationalization and emancipatory critique, allowing me to specify how Brockden's narrative fits within, and also presses against, eighteenth-century possibilities for Black Christian thought. Second, through a close reading of , attending to Moravian editorial practices, the narrative's affective economy, I show how the text's theodical logic naturalizes domination while portraying dissent as spiritual failure. Finally, informed by C. L. R. James's insistence that there are no classless philosophies, I treat the *Lebenslauf* not as private piety but as a political-economic text: a discourse whose theological consolations stabilize labor discipline, social hierarchy, and imperial sovereignty. James's lens makes legible the passage from spiritual obedience to social order, from interior sanctification to the normalization of bondage.

This approach yields three claims that structure the paper. First, Brockden's *Lebenslauf* should be recognized as philosophy by virtue of its explicit ontological, epistemological, and practical commitments: it explains what is real (a providential cosmos that redeems subjection), how we know (through inward assurance disciplined by ecclesial authority), and how we ought to live (as obedient subjects whose sanctity is proven in suffering). Second, the text exemplifies strong assimilationist theodicy, a form of rationalism/spiritualism that displaces material analysis, thereby laundering domination through religious meaning. Third, this early articulation presages a larger nineteenth-century problematic: the recurring struggle within Black American philosophy

over whether theodicy will serve liberation or order, whether the grammar of suffering will animate critique or mute it.

The essay unfolds in four parts. Part I situates the argument within debates about canonicity and method, clarifying what I mean by *published*, by *philosophy*, and by *strong assimilationism*, while briefly acknowledging rival candidates for primacy and explaining the criteria by which Brockden's text stands. Part II.a reconstructs the Moravian editorial regime and political theology that shaped the *Lebenslauf* genre, establishing the constraints under which enslaved voices were made legible. Part II.b offers a close reading of Brockden's narrative, tracing the movement from providential lexicon to moralized submission, and isolating the epistemic operations that privilege immaterial certitude over social causality. Part III turns to James to theorize the text's political-economic effects, mapping how its theodicy mediates labor, discipline, and sovereignty. The Conclusion sketches a genealogy into the nineteenth century, juxtaposing accommodationist and prophetic strands to argue that the question of theodicy—its uses, limits, and costs—became a central axis of Black American philosophy.

Recasting Brockden's *Lebenslauf* as foundational philosophy rather than mere devotional testimony is not an antiquarian gesture. It compels us to renegotiate the boundaries of the canon, to read religious genres as sites of subject formation and political work, and to confront the enduring temptation of theodicy to explain away domination in the name of spiritual order. By naming this early form of strong assimilationist theodicy, we can better see, both historically and today, how the promise

of inward peace can be made to service outward subjection, and why any liberatory philosophy of religion must refuse that bargain.

***Post Facto*: The Four Traditions of Black Thought**

According to Cornel West, in his text *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (1982), since the late-eighteenth century, there have been four critical traditions developed by Black people in America[1] in response to the legacy of European Enlightenment Age-induced anti-Black racism.[2] The first of these cultural philosophies is strong (ontological) and weak (sociological) exceptionalism, the view that "lauds the uniqueness of Afro-American culture and personality,"[3] and that Black people are superior to white people. Strong exceptionalism was a view held by early W.E.B. Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson, and Elijah Muhammad. Weak exceptionalism was propounded by the likes of Black leaders such as Marcus Garvey and Martin Luther King, Jr. The next tradition is strong (ontological) and weak (sociological) assimilationism, which "considers Afro-American culture and personality to be pathological"[4] and holds that Black people, because of their social and cultural inferiority, should strive to be more like white people. Weak assimilationism is a view that was held by thinkers such as Charles Wadell Chesnutt, Booker T. Washington, and early E. Franklin Frazier. Marginalism, an anti-mutualist view that "posits Afro-American culture to be restrictive, constraining, and confining,"[5] prevents perceptions of exceptionalism along lines of culture and essence, and that simultaneously finds white culture too exclusive along ontological and sociological lines, preventing assimilationism. The marginalist view "emphasizes the suppression of individuality,

eccentricity, and nonconformity within Afro-American culture,"[6] and was held by intellectuals and writers like Richard Wright and James Baldwin. Finally, humanism is the "the Afro-American…tradition that extolls the distinctiveness of Afro-American culture and personality"[7] but allows for the dialectics of both the grotesquery and the heroism of Black people as a possibility. Humanism "provides a cultural springboard useful in facing the ever-present issue of self-identity for Afro-Americans and joins their political struggle to other progressive elements in America,"[8] and was an epistemology communicated by Ralph Ellison and Toni Morrison.

West does not believe that there were any traditions of Black strong (ontological) assimilationists, those Black folk who hold the view that Black people are pathological in their very being, born diseased, and who, therefore, must assimilate to a model of white cultural and social norms. He maintains, in the "Notes" section of *Prophesy*, on page 164, "Fortunately, there are no Afro-American strong assimilationists, though there are still a few white ones around, e.g. Shockley and Jensen."[9] However, I claim that the first philosophical tradition to be articulated by a Black person in America was ontological, or strong assimilationism, and that it was annunciated as a theodicy. While marginalism and humanism are epistemological commitments that eschew and evade exceptionalism and assimilationism, these traditions do not begin to take shape until the twentieth century. Before then, in the time of the American Enlightenment of the nineteenth century, exceptionalism was the prevailing cultural philosophy of Black thinkers, who expressed these epistemologies as theodicies.

Theodicy is often articulated as the theological response to the presence of evil, or ponerology.[10] It is a realization that God allows bad things to happen to good people,

and is a search for the justness of God in the sufferings of humanity. In the Western tradition, while "Gottfried Willhelm Leibniz coined the term *Théodicée*"[11] in the eighteenth century, theodicy was first formulated by the early fathers of the Christian Church—Augustine, Aquinas, and Irenaeus—all of whom presented various explanations for why God allows suffering in the world. Augustine (354-430 AD) believed that "God is completely and eternally good,"[12] writing an elucidation of evil "as the privation of being"[13] where evil "becomes evil only when it ceases to be what it ought to be,"[14] that "[e]vil is a negative being, an absence of a positive good that ought to be present," thus having "no ontological being," "[existing] as the privation of a perfect being."[15]

Aquinas (1225-1274 AD), influenced by the thought of Augustine and his *Confessions*, emphasized action and potentiality in his theodicy, holding that "nature or being, whether fully realized or in potential towards realization, is basically good,"[16] and that "evil is simply the privation of a perfect being and therefore has no ontological status."[17] To Aquinas "[e]vil [could] exist only in something good because as a lack of being or privation it needs a host or a foundation which is a being and hence good."[18] In this way, Aquinas thinks of evil as sin and sin as a pathology that prevents man from being wholly just, or wholly whole, in the sense of Plato's account of Socrates attributing sickness to a dearth of virtue.[19]

In contrast to Augustinian and Aquinian theodicies, Irenaeus's very early Western theodicy was such that it grounded itself in human development, with Irenaeus (125-202 AD) "[maintaining] that men and women were created in an early stage of developmental awareness with the capacity and the call to grow toward ultimate

perfection,"[20] humanity "not [being] completely perfect, or totally evil."[21] To conclude this brief exploration of early and foundational Western theodicies I want to note why they are incompatible with Black American theodicies: regarding both Augustinian and Aquinian theodicies, a Black theodicy does not view evil as having no ontology. In various accounts of Black suffering, which this research document uncovers, evil takes multifarious forms. This multivariate form of evil is accounted for in Black theodicies as chattel slavery, Western Civilization, racism(s), and Black ghetto culture. In this account of Black suffering, Ireneausian theodicy falls flat as well because there is a segment of humanity that is totally evil, or pathological. A Black theodicy parses out this pathology along exceptionalist and assimilationist lines.

Within the Black American theological tradition, efforts to reconcile divine justice with Black suffering in the nineteenth century manifested primarily in two interpretive frameworks: the Mosaic and what I term the Joban. The Mosaic strand, representing a weak exceptionalist epistemology, construed African Americans as analogous to the Israelites of the Exodus—enslaved under Pharaoh's oppressive regime. This perspective affirmed that God aligned with the oppressed and warned that, should America (figured as Egypt) refuse to emancipate its enslaved population, divine judgment would precipitate national ruin.

Conversely, the Joban strand, reflecting a weak assimilationist epistemology, likened African Americans to the biblical Job of Uz, whose suffering ensued after God withdrew His protective hedge, permitting Satan to afflict his body. In this formulation, God's hedge of protection becomes secularized as America, Western civilization, and white cultural hegemony. To step outside this protective hedge was to incur suffering as

a heretic; to remain within it was to secure safety. Both the Mosaic and Joban theodicies sought to interpret divine sanction of Black suffering, yet neither framework—whether exceptionalist or assimilationist—predated the American Revolution or the founding of the United States. Rather, the earliest Black American theodicy emerged as a strong, ontological assimilationist epistemology articulated by an enslaved Black woman in the 1750s Colony of Pennsylvania.

Magdalena Beulah Brockden: Of Slavery, Sinners, and Strong Assimilationist Theodicy

Unlike the English and the Irish, when German whites began to emigrate *en masse* to the United States in the nineteenth century, they largely did not enslave Africans. In his paper, "German Immigrants and African Americans in Charleston, South Carolina, 1850-1880," included in the book *Germans and African Americans: Two Centuries of Exchange* (2010), Jeffery Strickland explains that, in South Carolina, while "most elite white Charlestonians viewed the Germans (immigrants) as white, they did not accept Germans into the urban establishment during the antebellum period." He writes, "It appears that most Germans did not aspire to own slaves, and this affected their status in southern society..."[22] Instead, Germans, who were "disinterested in planting and slaveholding,"[23] excelled as shopkeepers. As grocers and shopkeepers, "many Germans had the economic means to own slaves but they chose not to enter the slaveholding class, and they were underrepresented among people of means who chose to own slaves. The historian Walter Kamphœfner investigated slaveholding among Westphalian immigrants in Missouri with a view toward their socialization

patterns, and he determined that German immigrants were underrepresented as slaveholders in nearly every wealth category. The same was true in Charleston."[24]

A consideration of both the historiographical record and the historical evidence, as interpreted by Cedric Robinson in *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983), underscores the demographic and structural foundations of racial capitalism in the Americas. Drawing on Philip Curtin's quantitative analysis, Robinson notes that approximately 38 percent of all Africans transported to the New World as enslaved laborers were taken by Portuguese traders to Brazil. By contrast, British merchants consigned roughly 20 percent of their slave cargoes to the North American colonies—a figure amounting to less than 5 percent of the total number of Africans brought to the Americas by European powers. Curtin's best estimate places the number of Africans imported into the English colonies during the entire transatlantic slave trade at 399,000, with an additional 28,000 arriving via French traders supplying Louisiana.

Robinson further observes that this African population was most densely concentrated in the Southern colonies, particularly South Carolina, where Black people constituted approximately 60 percent of the colony's population in the eighteenth century. These demographic patterns not only shaped the economic and social order of the colonial South but also provided the material conditions for the emergence of a distinct Black radical tradition—one forged in the crucible of racialized labor exploitation and settler colonialism.

Additionally, during the Antebellum period, entering into the nineteenth century in South Carolina, for many years home to the largest concentration of Africans, which the Germans refused to enslave,[25] [26] as shopkeepers, they "sold liquor and traded with

slaves,"[27] even "[extending] credit to stimulate repeat business"[28] of enslaved people. These peculiar business practices infuriated the white Charlestonian elite and "[t]he Court of General Sessions prosecuted hundreds of German shopkeepers for selling liquor to slaves and trading with them for property requisitioned from their masters during the 1850s (Lesesne 84-85)."[29] This prosecution faced by German immigrants ("Jacob Schirmer, an influential German southerner, noted that the fines against shopkeepers for selling liquor to slaves were the highest allowed by the law (Schirmer, January 30, 1858),"[30] in addition to the persecution they faced by police, who "arrested countless Germans for loitering or allowing African Americans to loiter outside their stores—probably under the presumption that the Germans were conducting an illegal trade with them (see, for example, Daily Courier, November 21, 1853, April 7, 1854, July 12, 1855)."[31]

Consequently, on Germans and German emigration to the United States, Frederick Douglass, in an August 1859 article he writes, "A German has only to be a German to be utterly opposed to slavery. In feeling, as well as in conviction and principle, they are anti-slavery."[32] Douglass goes on to write, "…the many noble and high-minded men, most of whom, swept over by the tide of the revolution in 1849, have become our active allies in the struggle against oppression and prejudice."[33] Douglass, the formerly-enslaved abolitionist and editor of the *Douglass' Monthly*, believed that the March Revolution of the German Confederation (1848-1849), led by the "radical and liberal Forty-Eighters," "though anything but a solid bloc… [,] encompass[ing] a spectrum of different ideological outlooks, regional backgrounds, and occupational orientations," engendered in Germans almost a homogeneous and "profound aversion

to the American institution of slavery."[34]

Though enslaving Africans in America had never been common to German-speaking emigrants prior to 1850, an idiosyncratic eighteenth-century Colony of Pennsylvania community of Moravians were enslavers. Bethlehem, Pennsylvania was founded in 1741 by "members of a central European Protestant sect"[35] known in German lands as the *Brüdergemeine* and, in English-speaking places, simply as the Moravians. Egalitarian in their community formation, everyone in their commune was taught to read, "women and men of all races alike,"[36] "achieving nearly universal literacy in a community populated by people from five continents."[37] Additionally, "[w]omen were emancipated from privatized domestic labor in order to pursue leadership roles in the community,"[38] where they were "responsible for raising and educating girls, for teaching one another trades, for overseeing economic activity in their choirs, for representing their choirs in the governing councils of the city—and for attending to the spiritual needs of girls and women as spiritual guides (choir laboresses), deaconesses, missionaries, and priests."[39] The Moravians of Bethlehem developed a sophisticated utopic political economy they called the "General Economy" that was "technologically sophisticated and…successful."[40]

> Between 1741 and 1762, a population that grew from seventeen to seven hundred supported more than sixty different trades (many of them water-powered), constructed the first system of municipal running water in North America, and created a prosperous, economically vibrant and self-sustaining city that was regarded with admiration (and amazement) by visitors to the Pennsylvania frontier.[41]

"Everyone in the community was cared for, on terms of material equality, from birth until death, "[t]he Moravians eliminated poverty in their founding generation,"[42] and their General Economy foundationalized the infrastructure for the behemoth of industry that

would become known as Bethlehem Steel.[43] However, "[e]ven during its most egalitarian period…indeed, from its very inception…Bethlehem rested on a brutal racial contradiction."[44] Whereas the Africans "held as chattel in Moravian Bethlehem were privileged in comparison to most enslaved people—and it was one sign of that privilege that they were taught to read and encouraged to tell their life stories…they had been enslaved nonetheless and, in their memoirs, they described and reflected upon aspects of their bondage."[45]

Strict in the formation of their faith, the Moravians "had a spiritual responsibility to write a memoir—a *Lebenslauf* [life course]—that would tell the story of their Christian redemption."[46] These *Lebensläufe* "[recounted] the sinfulness of [their] author, her resistance to salvation, and her ultimate embrace of the Savior" and "affirmed the idiosyncratic Christian vision and social norms of the Moravian community."[47]

> The memoirs of enslaved people in Bethlehem rehearsed, later in life, the spiritual narrative that each had to develop in order to be admitted to the congregation and, in turn, to membership in the General Economy. It is important to remember that Bethlehem was a closed religious community. Only those who had embraced their particular spiritual vision could join the congregation. Any enslaved person who wished to become a full congregant—and live as a brother or sister within the General Economy—had to be capable of speaking in that idiom, of reproducing that narrative, and of organizing the facts of his or her life within its structure.[48]

The *Lebenslauf* was for the Moravians an organizing observation of their soul's salvation in the finished work of redemption of Jesus Christ on the cross, a testimony of God's irresistible grace subsumed by their unyielding faith. *Lebenslauf*, transliterally "the run of one's life", gives an account of one's theophanic encounter with Christ, how God saved them from their sin, suggesting that one did not live until they knew the ransoming power of Jesus. Consider, however, that for the enslaved Moravian, unlike

most African slaves, though fed with the food from their enslaver's table, though never brutalized by the crack of the whip, though taught to read and write, the antagonisms of their publishing a confession of their sinfulness while being sinfully enchained would engender some internal contradictions. This internal contradiction would become the site of strong assimilationist theodicy among the enslaved Moravian, in particular, Magdalena Beulah Brockden, whose memoir I examine below.

It is often thought that the earliest published Black people in the Americas were Phyllis Wheatley (*Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*) in 1773 and Olaudah Equiano (*The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Or Gustavus Vassa, the African*) in 1789. Yet, because of the idiopathic and idiosyncratic enslaving habits of the Moravians of Bethlehem, the first published writers of African ancestry on the North American continent were Moravian slaves. In fact, because of her memoir, "probably written in the mid-1750s,"[49] Magdalena Beulah Brockden's *Lebenslauf*, which has garnered a striking lack of attention,[50] "appears to be the first piece of writing by an African woman in North America, or at least the earliest thus far discovered."[51] Because of its deep theodicy, a philosophy of religion that gives an accounting of suffering through the metaphysics of ontology and personhood, seeking after an intelligible world while bounded, what I will work to prove is that Brockden's was strong assimilationist epistemology. Therefore, I claim that Brockden's Moravian memoir is the first published articulation of Black American philosophy.

Brockden was born in "Little Popo on the Guinea coast of Africa in 1731,"[52] and "was bought and sold repeatedly by the age of ten, when she was purchased by a wealthy white man named Charles Brockden—who called the enslaved girl, apparently

without any irony, Beulah, the promised land."[53] According to Seth Moglen in his paper "Enslaved in the City on a Hill: The Archive of Moravian Slavery and the Practical Past" (2016), when Brockden held converse with his soul, "disturbed and conflicted about his own slaveholding,"[54] he resolved that the woman must remain his property for her own protection, to keep her from lascivious living, determining that the best place for her to go is to the commune of Moravian Bethlehem. When she was twenty-seven, Beulah was finally fully manumitted into the community of the Moravians by Brockden, where she was baptized, and given the name Magdalena.[55] It was thereafter that she wrote her *Lebenslauf*, which, for the purposes of exegesis, I record in full as Moglen has in his text below:

> I was, as is known, a slave or the property of the late Mr. Brockden who bought me from another master, when I was ten years old and from then on I served his family until I was grown. Because my master was much concerned about the salvation of my soul and he saw that it was high time that I was protected from the temptations of the world and brought to a religious society, so he suggested to me that I should go to Bethlehem. Because I had no desire to do so, I asked him rather to sell me to someone else, for at that time I still loved the world and desired to enjoy it fully. However, my master said to me lovingly that I should go to Bethlehem and at least try it. He knew that I would be well treated there. And if it did not suit me there so he would take me back at any time. When I arrived here I was received with such love and friendship by the official workers and all the Brethren that I was much ashamed. [She arrived on November 23, 1743, in Bethlehem.] I soon received permission to remain here. My behavior at the beginning was so bad; I really tried to be sent away again, which did not happen. The love of the Brethren, however, and in particular the great mercy of the Saviour that I came to feel at this time moved me to stay here. Sometime after, my master came here and gave me his permission and blessing, and I became content and happy. **The Saviour showed great mercy to my poor soul, which was so deeply sunk in the slavery of sin that I never thought that I would be freed from these chains and could receive grace**. How happy I was for the words, "Also for you did Jesus die on the stem of the cross so that you may be redeemed and eternally blessed." I understood this in faith and received forgiveness for my sins.[56]

As Moglen notes, the Moravian slave memoir differed from the abolitionist narrative that "denounces the institution of slavery itself from the perspective of formerly enslaved people who had joined a revolutionary movement to overthrow the slave system."[57] Here, in the account of Brockden, in can be seen that she observes a behavior in herself that was "bad," acting in a way that would cause her to "be sent away again," presumably sold to another enslaver. These sentiments of Brockden reflect no critique of chattel slavery, no criticism of her coerced state of servitude. She is more critical of her propensity to behave such that she would be "sent away" than the fact that she is being held against her will, albeit in an egalitarian society of nonviolent slaveholders. In Bethlehem, the violence is in the holding, not in the brutalizing. That Brockden refers to her "bad behaviors" as "sins," in substance, communicating her desire to exist where she wills, how she wills, as a pathology, suggests a deep inner-conflict with her ontology, vivified by a dragooned assimilation through religiosity. Brockden is being assimilated while developing her own assimilationist epistemology and theodicy. "*Theodicy* literally means 'god's justice.' From theo (god) and *dikē* (justice), the word emerges from a problem forged by expectations of a good or benevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent deity,"[58] but to Brockden justice exists outside the Black body, lives abstracted from the Black soul. The bondage of the Black human spirit is greater than the bondage of chattel slavery.

Beulah Brockden's psychical break from her physical bondage while still enchained is a realization of her subjectivity where "the subject's possession of itself and its objects…is troubled by a dispossessive force [that] objects exert…," that "…subjectivity is understood also as subjection and subjugation…"[59] Yet, Brockden fails

to locate enslavement as the "dispossessive force" and rather views her sinful nature, predicative of her misdeed of wanting to be free, as the site of her subjection and subjugation rather than being subjugated by a colony of enslavers. In this way, she embraces the mind as a sphere of philosophical inquiry with privileged representations and the idea of a self-reflective transcendental subject whose only limitations is that she is a Black sinner. She writes not of how her chains were a sin, but that her great sin was the sin of her own soul. This is a view of cardinal sins versus mortal sins as abstracted from political sins, indeed the political, mortal, and cardinal sin of slavery. Her strong assimilationism, then, viewed her ontology as slavery without any analysis of the literal slavery her personhood existed under. She would rather be in the fellowship of "such love and friendship by the official workers and all the Brethren," such love that made her feel "ashamed" of her wayward soul, than to blanch the repute of Bethlehem. Beulah's "poor soul" needed saving, her physical freedom be damned. In the Book of Job, upon God agreeing with Satan's overtures to remove the hedge of protection about Job of Uz, God instructs the devil to only touch his body, not his soul. In a Christian environment, the devil of chattel slavery, tied to white supremacy and its fortifying other, capitalism, bettered that instruction and blighted the soul of Magdalena Beulah Brockden. In essence, Brockden did not mind being the property of the Moravians, as long as she was not the property of sin.

The earliest Black American philosophical framework reflects modes of acquiescence to what might be construed as a "slave mentality" through strong assimilationism, constituting an ontological reductionism articulated within a philosophy of religion. Religion—derived from the Latin *religare*, meaning "to bind again"—in this

context becomes vast and immanent, tolerating no dissent within the body politic. I contend that this epistemology functions as a foundational cognitive precursor to what may be termed Black Christian nationalism.

Christian nationalism is commonly defined as the advocacy for a nation governed by Christian values and laws, permeating the structures of civil society. Brockden's theodicy represents a variation of this paradigm, insofar as she interrogates her spiritual station with greater intensity than her social station. Brockden, an enslaved Black woman later manumitted, never repudiated her Christian testimony according to extant sources. Thus, strong assimilationism as a theodicy is grounded in spiritualism—an immaterialism that privileges metaphysical redemption over material liberation.

No evidence suggested that Beulah would obtain freedom; indeed, her husband Andrew remained enslaved despite being admitted as a full member of the congregation prior to Beulah herself. Yet Beulah professed joy upon hearing the words: "[h]ow happy [she] was for the words, 'Also for you did Jesus die on the stem of the cross so that you may be redeemed and eternally blessed'," a promise of salvation experienced amid coercive servitude. Theodicy and nationalism frequently operate as coeval epistemologies within Black radical thought. However, they are often imbued with a conservatism that inhibits comprehensive critique of the structural systems inimical to Black existence.

The Theodicy of Black Christian Nationalism: An Upholding of Rationalism, the Perfect Philosophy for Management and Subordination

On the night of June 17, 2015, during a Bible study, under the guise of humble prayer, a white supremist opened fire on a group of Black members of Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, killing nine. During the funeral of the church's pastor, Member of the South Carolina Senate Clementa C. Pinckney, after rendering a eulogy for the slain governmental official, standing behind the seal of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, President Barack Obama ascended into a rendition of the traditional church hymn "Amazing Grace". At this, sat behind the president, enrobed in their veronica frocks, the Black bishops, pastors, and elders of the AME Church, the oldest Black American Christian denomination, jumped up in unison thrall, like characters in Son House's "Preaching Blues", ecstatic and enthralled. What significance could this scene have? Could it be that these Black preachers esteem "Amazing Grace" as an empyrean and indispensable song of the Church? Or could it be that sighting the holder of the nation's highest office, and a Black man, through sonorous and solidaristic sonics, seemed aligned with their theological vision for a theocratic America?

To be frank, I have little concern about white Christian nationalism, also called Christian fascism. Concern, at least in part, would needs grow out of shock or surprise. By now, white people being racist and xenophobic should surprise no one. No one ought to be gobsmacked by the varied permutations that whiteness marshals racisms like a toothless crow hoarding a dying and bloodied mink. Whiteness and fascism go together as a technology of procuring and maintaining power. This is known.

I am concerned, however, about Black Christian nationalism. Besides being a Black atheist, when visions of God and his justice have inspired and sustained Black revolutionaries and reformists from Denmark Vesey, Gabriel Prosser, and Nat Turner to

Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fannie Lou Hamer, being a Black Christian nationalist seems an irremediable contradiction of fates. Yet, many a Black parishioner has sat under Christian nationalist theology of a multifarious Sunday, and thought nothing of it. When I was coming of age in the Black Church of the humid wetlands of Southeastern Virginia, a non-denominational congregation with National Baptist precepts and Pentecostal views, enrobed in trench coats, two disaffected and murderous youths massacred their classmates at a high school in Colorado. It happened on a Tuesday. The following Lord's Day, having mounted the sacred desk, as he preached, my pastor suggested that the reason for the shooting, at the time the deadliest school shooting in U.S. history, the sordid progenitor of many more, was that prayer had been taken out of the schools. Quoting 2 Chronicles 7:14, he said "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."[60] This was a Black whooping preacher from Suffolk, Virginia, who lived under the swelter of racial apartheid, in 1999 intoning the sentiment of Oklahoma Representative Jim Olsen in 2024, who sponsored a bill to bring the Ten Commandments to public school classrooms.[61]

The Black Christian nationalism that I observe is like that vulgar materialism that Trinidadian philosopher and occasional Trotskyist C.L.R. James writes about in his text *State Capitalism and World Revolution* (1950). What James calls vulgar materialism is tantamount to that hermeneutic that sees the material conditions of working-class people yet offers few tactile operations of how to ameliorate them. It is what James calls Christian humanism. James compares Christian humanists to Stalinists (whom they

often abetted), who represent the most dangerous counter-revolution because they cloak themselves in materialist language,[62] while the kernel of their philosophy is that "the worker must work harder than he ever did before"[63] under a system of state-run capitalism. For James, these Catholic Christians of mid-century Europe, who believe the "masses must not have absolute sovereignty,"[64] are "militantly anti-rationalist,"[65] yet "militantly anti-democratic,"[66] and in their allegiance to bourgeois political economy and statism "prepares the middle classes to resist to the end the proletarian revolution and to adapt themselves at decisive moments to Fascism."[67] According to James, the Christian humanist appropriates the Hegelian dialectic, interpreting it as an unceasing conflict between affirmation and negation, between deciding for or deciding against.[68] If James is right, and philosophy must be more proletarian,[69] more accessible to the working-class masses, then theology too must become more insistent upon the working class and working poor experience. Otherwise, the rationalist philosophy of Stalinism, that is, "the philosophy of the elite, the bureaucracy, the organizers, the leaders,"[70] runs hazard of becoming the theology of the Black Church, if it is not already.

In the final move of *State Capitalism and World Revolution*, his treatise of the Fourth International and the variegated forms of draconian or socialistic nationalized political economies, in the chapter entitled "Philosophy and State Capitalism," C.L.R. James develops a discourse around which major schools of thought are most conducive to the maintenance of regimes of power and which are most constitutive of liberation from these regimes. To James, while materialism engenders in the masses of working-class people a wellspring of political engagement towards radical change, rationalism is the philosophy of the intellectual and managerial elite.[71] While he cites Kant as the first

philosopher of the "modern world of the dialectic which begins with the recognition of contradiction,"[72] James avers that "the greatest of all the bourgeois philosophers, the most encyclopedic mind that Europe had produced, the founder of the dialectic, in Engels' words, the maker of an epoch,"[73] was Hegel.

Yet, in James' rendering, Hegel "could not transcend his historic barrier and was recaptured in the rationalist trap from which he had sought so profoundly to extricate European thought."[74] James writes, "Hegel destroyed all dogmatisms but one—the dogmatism of the backwardness of the masses."[75] James' is a similar discussion about the materialist conception of the state that is found in Marx's *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'* (1843-44), and how much confidence Hegel imputes the revolutionary character of the Bureaucracy against how much confidence Marx assigns to the radical capacity of the working class. Here is a summation of Marx's critique of Hegel's philosophy of right, as it inspired James: A materialist conception of the state, that is, the state-mind, that is, the political state (static status), not the modern state as an abstraction of the *real man*[76] but the state represented in its totality by the Legislature (Constitution), is not as the law yet to be discovered but the enfleshment of the popular desire of executive power (the will of the Civil Society made public).[77] This Legislature is the conscious self (Ego, character, constitution) of the political state, which is mediated by Civil Society (unary masses of individuals) through the Estates, the Estates themselves an embodiment of the dynamic/static dialecticism of the political state by which Civil Society is made more than Appearance, transforming itself into political society, or actual society, showing itself as the drive for the most fully possible universal participation in legislative power.[78] The formulation of the state hinges upon

the dialectics of the participatory capacity of the Estates to bring Public Affairs into actual being, the Estates themselves the Executive singularity individuated as many. Public Affairs and the Estates possess each other in a dialectical formation that is *an sich* and *für sich*, that is, "of itself" and "for itself," thus *content* and *form*, the immaterial and the material in a single, unifying Self, as it, the Estates, holding the potentiality towards ever-transmuting the state, interacts *vis-à-vis* empirical consciousness (materialism of history) as motricity from intellectual intuitionism (mysticism and spiritualism).[79]

The dialectic of the Estates and Civil Society is challenged by the dialectic of Bureaucracy and Corporations, which too have a hypostatic union, yet are in a state of constant struggle for control.[80] Corporations (materialist), in this way, are bureaucratic, and the Bureaucracy (immaterialist) is corporatistic, both vying for a procurement and maintenance of power and authority of the state. Bureaucracy (and Corporations), the greatest enemy of vigorous action, rising with the rise in capitalism, concretizing power within itself through capital, is nothing but the formalism of power; however, it is a mystification (mythologization) and spiritualization (anti-materialization) of the Executive, that is, the functioning potential of the Estates as executors of the Legislature towards activating Civil Society through Public Affairs.[81] The bureaucrat, then, is the theologian of this anti-materialism, this spiritualism of the Appearance of power, to wit, the Bureaucracy (the imaginary state) in its relation to the state.[82] Because of this mystification, mysticization, and mythification, an anti-materialist political philosophy made manifest via Corporatist interest, the power of the Bureaucracy has been its ability to obscure the function of the Estates, the mediator between the Crown[83] and the

Executive, in the curating and creating the state through direct participation in politics *vis-à-vis* Civil Society.[84] Instead, the Estates become confederate with the Crown and the Bureaucracy and the Corporations. Often, the Estates, an entity, the only which is capable of mounting radical change, is deputized by the Bureaucracy, the salaried functionaries of the bourgeoisie,[85] an organized political opposition to Civil Society.[86] [87]

Thus, "Once," James says, "the revolutionary solution of the contradiction escaped him," that is, eluded Hegel during (and after) the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815) when he published *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) and *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1820), "he clung to the bureaucracy."[88] "Hegel," James recounts, "did not know the socialized proletariat,"[89] and "began by regarding all history as the history of the philosopher, or consciousness and self-consciousness, and ended with the state bureaucracy."[90]

> The intellectual elite would rescue society and discipline the revolting masses. Reinstated were uncritical materialism, a purely material existence for the masses, and uncritical idealism, the solution of social crisis by the intellectual bureaucracy.[91]

This is the Summum Bonum of German idealism as it is read through Kant and Hegel: it is a philosophy that seeks "to propagate the fiction of the classless nature of rationalism and materialism,"[92] that sees the "enemy [as] the proletariat resisting labor discipline by the bureaucracy,"[93] and that spiritualizes form and content of political statism, thereby precluding the working classes from engaging in perfecting the public affairs of society. As James writes, "Materialism without the dialectics of objective contradiction is idealism."[94]

For James, German idealism and French rationalism possessed the same pitfalls. While he agrees that Hegel had his own criticism of rationalism, that

"[c]ontradiction, not harmonious increase and decrease, is the creative," "[a]ll development takes place as a result of self-movement, not organization or direction by external forces," "[s]elf-movement springs from an is the overcoming of antagonisms within an organism, not the struggle against external foes," "[i]t is not the world of nature that confronts man as an alien power to be overcome," and "[t]he end toward which mankind is inexorably developing by the constant overcoming of internal antagonisms is not the enjoyment, ownership or use of goods, but self-realization, creativity based upon the incorporation into the individual personality of the whole previous development of humanity."[95] As he writes, "Marx himself in his fight against the vulgar materialism reaffirmed that 'the Hegelian contradiction (is) the source of all dialectic.' Without the dialectic of Hegel, the idealism of Hegel could not be destroyed."[96]

Though, for Hegel, "theodicy [was] a philosophical endeavor that reconciles thought with evil through a systematic grasping of history,"[97] he was prevented from "[carrying] the dialectical logic to its conclusions in the socialist revolution because he could not base himself on the advanced industrial proletariat."[98] What "he saw and described with horror [was] the fragmentation and loss of individuality by the worker under the capitalist division of labor,"[99] "but the workers whom he knew were not the organized, disciplined and united proletariat which had by Marx's time begun to announce itself as the new organizer of society and which we know so well today."[100] Hegel's idealism, thus, became inhibited by the material realities of his day. Therefore, it is understandable that Hegel's idealism functions as a rationalism, similar to Beulah Brockden.

Could it be that Brockden's theology suffers the same pitfalls as Hegel's penchant for aiding and abutting a managerial middle class of professionalized, intellectual elites through the rigidity of the dialectical formulation of her strong assimilationism? Hers is a rationalism (spiritualism), which is "the philosophy of bourgeois political economy"[101] that denies her material reality in favor of the transcendental unseen. To conclude, Brockden's theodicy is dissociative of the material malevolence facing her, thus idealist, and, thus, in its materialism is classless. Therefore, if James is right, and rationalism is a political philosophy that "seeks to expand the productive forces and increase the sum total of goods,"[102] a rationalist accounting of personhood is "a division of labor between the passive masses and the active elite,"[103] thereby reinstating idealism.[104] Consequently, the essence of rationalism is uncritical or vulgar materialism.[105]

This vulgar materialism, which observes through the imagery of the cross of Calvary the material conditions of working-class people yet offers few tactile operations of how to ameliorate them, is tantamount to what James calls Christian humanism. He writes:

> The Christian Humanists have a systematic political economy. They propose decentralized self-governing corporations of private property with every worker in his place. They have a philosophy of history. They believe in the eternal ambiguities of the human situation and the impossibility of ever attaining human freedom on earth. They have a theory of politics. The natural and ideological elite must rule, the masses must not have absolute sovereignty. Since evil and imperfection are eternal, they say, the alternatives are either limited sovereignty or unmitigated authoritarianism.[106]

This is the picture of Black body under the aegis of imperial dogma—spiritualist, immaterialist, enslaved, forced to labor in the noonday sun of their obnubilated soul.

This is the consequence of the propagation of "the fiction of the classless nature of rationalism and materialism."[107] The spiritualism of strong assimilationist theodicy is that it accounts for Black suffering while discounting the humanity of the subjectivized being—a being capable of both Apollonian heroism and Nietzschean grotesqueries.[108] Brockden's proto-American Enlightenment Black theodicy presages the false dichotomy between exceptionalism and assimilationism in Black radical philosophy (nationalism and emigrationism), which would lead the thought production of Black thinkers from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, from David Walker and Alexander Crummell to Marcus Garvey and E. Franklin Frazier. Though advocating a release from physical bondage, this false dichotomy of theodicies of exceptionalism and assimilationism implicitly encouraged an allegiance to statism and imperialism, without observing a third option, a liberationist theodicy, a modality abstracted from the capitalist drive for world mastery. Consequently, along the line of demarcation between exceptionalist and assimilationist theodicy, Christian humanists and Christian nationalists are allowed to flourish, using religion to procure and maintain power.

Conclusion

The proto-theodicy of Magdalena Beulah Brockden, the earliest published Black American philosophy, illuminates the trajectory of Black American thought in at least three respects. First, Black philosophy is forged in and through struggle. Second, it is often self-interrogating to a fault, at times more rigorously critical of itself than of traditions, such as so-called egalitarian fascism, draconian utopianism, or Christian nationalism, that obscure or deracinate the very communities that produced them. Third,

like much philosophy, it can tilt toward rationalist or idealist aspirations to classlessness, even when ample historical and scientific evidence troubles those aspirations. Brockden's inquiries into theodicy, ontology, subjectivity, and personhood were shaped by a pronounced assimilationist sensibility, a rationalist–spiritualist posture that discounted aspects of her own being and blunted the possibility of a sustained critique of the structures that enslaved her. Her request to Charles Brockden, an early enslaver and namesake—"to sell [her] to someone else, for at that time I still loved the world and desired to enjoy it fully"—registers a capitulation to the social stratification and political economy of Bethlehem society. Brockden's strong assimilationist dogma restricted the horizon of her world-love as surely as her enslavement did; yet only her ontology became the locus of philosophical inquiry. In this sense, her philosophizing functioned as an inadvertent extension of nationalist and imperial projects underwriting expansionist American procedures, she being quadruply colonized: an African slave within the Moravian settlement of Bethlehem, within the Colony of Pennsylvania, within the Thirteen Colonies of Great Britain.

---

[1] In the "Notes" section of *Prophesy*, West explains the following about these four "traditions" of epistemological responses by Black people. Though he suggests that for Black people this was in response to the legacy of anti-Black racism in the modern world, he specifies that these four responses can be basic to any group.

[2] Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982), 69-70.

[3] Ibid, 70.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid, 71.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid, 91.

[9] Ibid, 164.

[10] Ponerology as the study of evil deals with all aspects of the presence of evil in the world. This study could be about the nature of evil, it could be speculation on the possibility of ending evil, etc. Theodicy as an area of systematic theology, and as a philosophy of religion, deals in epistemics of how evil might be explained in a universe where God is the Potentate, a universe that is not always readable, or intelligible.

[11] Neal Spadafora, "Calling the World Dead: Marx's Philosophy of History and the Question of Theodicy," *Political Theology*, November (2025): 3.

[12] James Arthur Holmes, *Black Nationalism and Theodicy: A Comparison of the Thought of Henry Highland Garnet, Alexander Crummell, and Henry McNeal Turner* (Boston: Boston University, 1997), 212.

[13] Ibid, 213.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid, 214.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Plato, *The* Republic (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 157.

[20] Holmes, 215.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Jeffery Strickland, *German Immigrants and African Americans in Charleston, South Carolina, 1850-1880,* ed. Larry A. Greene and Anke Ortlepp in *Germans and African Americans: Two Centuries of Exchange* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 55.

[23] Ibid, 56.

[24] Ibid, 115-17.

[25] Germans' refusal to enslave Africans should not suggest that they held a humanistic belief in racial equality. According to Strickland, during Reconstruction, "Germans became white southerners first, Germans second," a process that, for example, "was more gradual in Charleston and it was not complete until 1876." (*Germans and African Americans: Two Centuries of Exchange* (2010), p.60)

[26] Strickland, 60.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid, 55.

[29] Ibid, 56.

[30] Ibid, 57.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Mischa Honeck, *An Unexpected Alliance: August Willich, Peter H. Clark, and the Abolitionist Movement in Cincinnati,* ed. Larry A. Greene and Anke Ortlepp in *Germans and African Americans: Two Centuries of Exchange* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 35.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Seth Moglen, "Enslaved in the City on a Hill: The Archive of Moravian Slavery and the Practical Past," *History of the Present*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Fall 2016): 159.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid, 160.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid, 159.

[43] Ibid, 178.

[44] Ibid, 160.

[45] Ibid, 159.

[46] Ibid, 164.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid, 165.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid, 173.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid, 174.

[55] Ibid, 175.

[56] Ibid, 165-66.

[57] Ibid, 177.

[58] Lewis Gordon, 2013, "Race, Theodicy, and the Normative Emancipatory Challenges of Blackness," *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 725.

[59] Fred Moten, "The Sentimental Avant-Garde" in *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 1-2.

[60] 2 Chronicles 7:14, *King James Bible*

[61] "Olsen Files Bill to Display Ten Commandments in Public School Classrooms," https://www.okhouse.gov/posts/news-20230102_1

[62] C.L.R. James, *State Capitalism and World Revolution* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1986), 126.

[63] Ibid, 121.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid, 126.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid, 127.

[68] Ibid, 128.

[69] Ibid, 130.

[70] Ibid, 121.

[71] Ibid, 119.

[72] Ibid, 117.

[73] Ibid, 120.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid, 119.

[76] Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1970), 137.

[77] Ibid, 118.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid, 62-7.

[80] Ibid, 46-7.

[81] Ibid, 47-8, 67.

[82] Ibid, 47.

[83] Synecdochical of the investiture of singularized authority of the many into a Sovereign.

[84] Ibid, 118, 125.

[85] Friedrich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1892), 86.

[86] Marx, 61.

[87] Written in close succession to his *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'*, Marx's "On the Jewish Question" (1844) further clarifies his conception of civil society. In this text, Marx characterizes civil society as the sphere in which the human being appears in an unpolitical form, defined by egoism, particularity, and the pursuit of private interests characteristic of the bourgeois individual (Marx [1844] 2010, 15). From this perspective, Marx understands civil society not as a neutral domain of social interaction but as a historically specific configuration through which bourgeois power is reproduced and class antagonisms are intensified. Consequently, civil society functions as an alienating structure whose internal contradictions, in Marx's view, would ultimately precipitate its own dissolution and the emergence of a classless, communist society.

[88] James, 120.

[89] Ibid, 124.

[90] Ibid, 125.

[91] Ibid, 120.

[92] Ibid, 123.

[93] Ibid.

[94] Ibid, 124.

[95] Ibid, 117.

[96] Ibid, 118.

[97] Spadafora, 1.

[98] Ibid, 119.

[99] Ibid.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Ibid, 115.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Ibid, 127.

[107] Ibid, 123.

[108] Victor Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Essay on Religious and Cultural Criticism* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016)

Bibliography

2011. *King James Authorised Version.* Swindon: Bible Society.

Anderson, Victor. 2016. *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Essay on African American Religious and Cultural Criticism.* London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Engels, Friedrich. 1892. *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. https://foreignlanguages.press/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/C04-Socialism-Utopian-and-Scientific-4th-Printing.pdf

Gordon, Lewis R. 2013. "Race, Theodicy, and the Normative Emancipatory Challenges of Blackness." *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, pp.725-736. DOI 10.1215/00382876-2345252

Holmes, James Arthur. 1997. *Black Nationalism and Theodicy: A Comparison of the Thought of Henry Highland Garnet, Alexander Crummell, and Henry McNeal Turner.* Boston: Boston University.

Honeck, Mischa. 2010. "An Unexpected Alliance: August Willich, Peter H. Clark, and the Abolitionist Movement in Cincinnati." In *Germans and African Americans: Two Centuries of Exchange*, by Larry A. Greene and Anke Ortlepp. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

James, C.L.R..1986. *State Capitalism and World Revolution.* Chicago: Charles H. Kerr.

Marx, Karl. 1970. *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'.* Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press.

——. ‘On the Jewish Question’, 2010. https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/On%20The%20Jewish%20Question.pdf

Moglen, Seth. 2016. "Enslaved in the City on a Hill: The Archive of Moravian Slavery and the Practical Past." *History of the Present, Vol. 6, No. 2* 155-163. https://doi.org/10.5406/historypresent.6.2.0155

Moten, Fred. 2001. In *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*, by Fred Moten. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Plato. *The* Republic. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000

Spadafora, Neal. 2025. "Calling the World Dead: Marx's Philosophy of History and the Question of Theodicy." *Political Theology*. November, 1-20. doi:10.1080/1462317X.2025.2586847

Strickland, Jerry. 2010. "German Immigrants and African Americans in Charleston, South Carolina, 1850-1880." In *Germans and African Americans: Two Centuries of Exchange*, by Larry A. Greene and Anke Ortlepp. Jackson: University of Mississippi.

West, Cornel. 1982. *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity.* Philadelphia: The Westminster Press.