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#### Only a foundational grounding in clear principles of nonviolence can facilitate a successful struggle for liberation. An approach that does not explicitly rule out violent tactics ensures an eventual move towards violence with counterproductive consequences

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(William, Social Movements and Strategic Nonviolence, www2.ucsc.edu/whorulesamerica/change/science\_nonviolence.html)

Despite the effectiveness of strategic nonviolence, complete adherence to it has been abandoned by some of the most visible and influential activists since the mid-1960s. This move toward the inclusion of violent acts in the repertoire of movement tactics began when Black Power advocates became increasingly impatient with the lack of responsiveness to plans for increasing political and economic integration after the Civil Rights Movement achieved its primary goals through the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. They were first deeply disappointed by the failure of the 1964 Democratic National Convention to seat the integrated delegation of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. That delegation was rejected, at the insistence of President Lyndon B. Johnson, except for two tokens, in favor of a racist delegation of tradition Southern Democrats who would not even pledge to support the Democratic nominee. It was truly a defining moment, a great divide between egalitarians and liberals within the Democratic Party on how to confront Southern white racists . Militant black activists also watched in despair as the conservative voting bloc continued to limit those kinds of government spending that might give African-Americans a chance to improve their economic position. Moreover, there was foot dragging and outright refusal by trade unions to integrate their apprenticeship programs. This situation suggested that the unionized white working class was not prepared to share good jobs with African-Americans, belying the support for civil rights by many union leaders. Nor was there any sign of a loosening in residential segregation, which meant among other things that African-Americans would not have access to the best public schools. For understandable but lamentable reasons, then, several top leaders in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee gave up on nonviolence and working with whites, creating conflict within the organization with those who wanted to continue as a nonviolent and integrated movement. Soon after, Black Power advocates won out in this argument, turning to inflammatory rhetoric about "taking up the gun" that threatened many whites and validated their worst fears. Black Power advocates then found allies in the North with the creation of the Black Panther Party, a self-identified revolutionary Marxist group, whose goals and armed confrontations with the police led to shoot outs and deaths in several cities. The Black Power stance of the Black Panthers and what remained of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee gave the movement for African-American equality and opportunity a violent and frightening image that alienated most whites. Feeling blocked on all sides, and doubting that whites would become any less prejudiced, many African-American communities exploded on their own, starting in south central Los Angeles in 1965, often in response to policy brutality, and with little or no prompting from Black Power advocates. These upheavals reached a peak in the extensive protests and property destruction in reaction to the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1968. Contrary to claims that they were aimless riots, they turned out to be more purposeful and targeted at specific businesses than was originally thought. Furthermore, there is reason to believe that jobs were created in response to these eruptions, and funding for existing government programs targeted at ghetto areas was increased. In the first few years after these long hot summers, it seemed like the uprisings had a pay-off, and therefore made some political sense. However, with the help of hindsight, a bigger fact needs to be faced: the long-term effects of the violence were negative. The outbursts were an understandable reaction to pent-up frustration and anger, and they had specific messages to deliver, but they were nonetheless a political mistake. The fact that they occurred shows the need for any future egalitarian movement to have its principles clear and in place before becoming involved in highly emotional events that are not easily understood or controlled as they unfold. It is not possible to spread the word about why violent disorders are not a good idea while they are happening. A new egalitarian movement would have to explain why they are unproductive well before they are on the horizon, not sit back and let them happen. For example, the gulf between blacks and whites expanded as the disruptions continued over several summers. Suspicion and anger were increased on both sides. Cities like Newark and Detroit still had not recovered from the withdrawal of investment 35 years later. "Law and order" became a code word for the enlargement of a criminal justice system that was used to control black communities. Some white voters in the North expressed their approval of a hard-line government approach by voting against the Democratic candidates for president in 1968 and 1972, helping to destroy the New Deal coalition in the process. Polls are also quite telling on the negative consequences of violence. While American public opinion gradually liberalized from the 1960s to the 1980s on a wide range of issues championed by egalitarian movements, such as women's rights, it went the other way on anything to do with violence and disorder. For example, from 1965 to 1969 there was a 26 percent rise in the percentage of people saying that courts were not harsh enough, bringing the total to 83 percent. Support for the death penalty declined from 73 percent in 1953 to 47 percent in 1965, but then jumped back up to 50 percent in 1966 and to 80 percent by 1980.

#### Violent resistance is intrinsically connected to violent masculinity and patriarchy. The move towards violence ensures resistance failure and subjugation of those seen as weak

Bartkowski 13, Senior Director at the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict

(Maciej, Recovering Nonviolent History: Civil Resistance in Liberation Struggles, pg. 339)

Changing entrenched views about the effectiveness of armed resistance is particularly hard as they are usually rooted in a warrior psychology that is shaped by violent masculinity and patriarchy. Struggles for independence typically have privileged male leadership. As a consequence, conspiracies of belligerent men plotting in small, secretive circles in an atmosphere that congratulates violent bravery and rewards machismo, leave little room for recognizing the importance of nonviolent alternatives or the contributions of women or non-fighting-age young men to the struggle. In fact, the discourse of hegemonic victors tends to conform to a masculinist construct that, as Jean Bethke Elshtain maintains, from antiquity though to the present has divided society into “just warriors” (male fighters and protectors) and “beautiful souls” (female victims and noncombatants). The circle of just warriors is also limited as it would normally exclude men who wanted to play other roles (i.e., gays) or their virility did not conform to the prevailing warrior achetype. Furthermore, teaching history, including the rise of nations, formation of state institutions, conduct of state politics, and development and implementation of public policies, shapes a nation’s commemorative landscape and punctuates it with stories of military battles, patriotic risings, wars and violent defeats – all dominated by men, be they soldiers, scholars, politicians, or other elite actors. This has inhibited people from remembering, acknowledging, and understanding the presence and efficacy of civil resistance, including the central place of women engaged in writing and distributing petitions; organizing and leading demonstrations and protests; setting up and running autonomous associations and educational institutions; and supporting and participating in social and economic boycotts, strikes and sit-ins. Masculinity and Civil Resistance. While armed struggle and violent masculinity are almost symbiotically joined in the historical imagination, the question of systemic male domination in civil resistance is more complex and ambiguous. Foreign occupation and colonization has frequently been based on economic exploitation and has often involved cultural genocide or extreme forms of coercion such as slavery, forced migration, resettlement, and conscription. Often a systematic part of foreign domination has been sexual exploitation of women and (as mentioned in Chapter 7 on Egypt) humiliation of indigenous men. In conditions where a foreign colonizer’s racist stereotypes affected both a symbolic and real emasculation, the oppressed population – particularly its men – often saw “regaining manhood” as a basic element of independence equivalent to self-respect or dignity. Becoming men is thus a common theme to be found in both armed and nonviolence anticolonial stuggles, as indeed in other struggles against other kinds of oppression.

#### Belief in the necessity of violent struggle to overcome oppression is not a neutral conception grounded in fact – it’s the result of an intentionally distorted history that privileges armed combat. The negative will offer case studies to disrupt the dominant narrative of glorious battle for freedom in order to open new productive paths that enable successful non-violent resistance.

Bartkowski 13, Senior Director at the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict

(Maciej, Recovering Nonviolent History: Civil Resistance in Liberation Struggles, pg. 1)

Most people look to historical accounts to understand how their own nations emerged and fought for their freedom. Such explanations, whether found in books or imparted though public ceremonies and national memories, often tell of violent battles and insurrections, victories and defeats in wars, and fallen heroes in armed struggles. These narratives support the common belief that violence is the indispensable weapon to win freedom from foreign subjugation, but they ignore the power and historical role that nonviolent civilian-led resistance has played in many national quests for liberation. This book brings to light the existence and impact of nonviolent organizing and defiance where it has not commonly been noticed. It argues that a number of historical struggles for national self-determination might not necessarily, or even primarily, have been won through violence. Instead, these struggles were decisively waged through diverse methods of nonviolent resistance led by ordinary people. Furthermore, during the unfolding process of civil resistance, it was often the force of population-driven, bottom-up, nonviolent mobilization that shaped nations’ collective identities (i.e., nationhood) and formed nascent national institutions and authorities (i.e., statehood). These processes were critical for an independent nation-state – more so than structural changes or violent revolutions that dominate the history of revolutionary struggles and nation making. Recovering Civil Resistance. This book reveals little-known, but important, histories of civil resistance in national struggles for independence and against foreign domination throughout the world in the past 200 years. Often, these histories have been misinterpreted or erased altogether from collective memory, buried beneath nationally eulogized violence, commemorative rituals of glorified death, martyred heroes, and romanticized violent insurrections. In recovering hidden stories of civil resistance that involve diverse types of direct defiance and more subtle forms of everyday, relentless endurance and refusal to submit, this book shows how the actions of ordinary people have undermined the authority and control of foreign hegemons – colonizers and occupiers – and their domestic surrogates. Despite extreme oppression, the repertoire of nonviolent action has often helped societies survive and strengthen their social and cultural fabric, build economic and political institutions, shape national identities, and pace the way to independence. The narrative of the book contains a heuristic inquiry into forgotten or ignored accounts of civil resistance, showing how knowledge about historical events and processes is generated, distorted, and even ideologized in favor of violence-driven, structure-based, or powerholder-centric interpretations. Glorified violence in the annals of nations, the gendered nature of violence wielded by men, state independence that is seen as having been founded largely on violence (the view reinforced by a state monopoly on violence as way to maintain that independence), and human attention and media focus (both centered on dramatic and spectacular stories of violence and heroic achievements of single individuals) all dim the light on the quiet, nonviolent resistance of millions. This type of struggle neither captures the headlines nor sinks into people’s memories unless it provokes the regime’s response and, more often that not, a violent one. The outcomes of seemingly violent struggles with foreign adversaries have depended to a large degree on the use of political – nonviolent – means rather than arms. Materially and militarily powerful empires and states have been defeated by poorly armed or even completely unarmed opponents not because they met irresistibly violent force, but because the nations found another source of strength – the total mobilization of the population via political, administrative, and ideological tools. Thus, political organizing has been the key ingredient in the people’s revolutions that have helped the militarily weaker successfully challenge powerful enemies. Examples include, among others, the Spanish insurrectionists against Napoleon, the Chinese revolutionaries against the Japanese Army, and the North Vietnamese against the United States and its South Vietnamese allies. In all of these supposedly violence-dominated conflicts, military tools were subordinated to a broader political struggle for the “hearts and minds” of ordinary people. By recovering the stories of nonviolent actions, this book goes against a tide of prevailing views about struggles against foreign domination that fail to recognize and take into account the role and contribution of civil resistance.

#### We present the following case studies in order to challenge dominant narratives that valorize armed struggle and dismiss the power of nonviolent resistance:

#### Ghana - nonviolent resistance was able to quickly and successfully overthrow imperialist repression

Bartkowski 13, Senior Director at the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict

(Maciej, Recovering Nonviolent History: Civil Resistance in Liberation Struggles, pg. 63)

The newly independent state of Ghana took a leading role in advocating and using civil resistance. In Deember 1958 independent Ghana hosted the All-African Peoples’ Conference, a follow-up to the 1945 Pan-African Congress. Patrice Lumumba and Tom Mboya were there along with a large Algerian contingent. In his opening speech, Nkrumah attributed the success of the Ghanaian independence movement to nonviolent positive action. Kojo Botsio, who led the CPP delegation, told countries still struggle for liberation that, “with the united will of the people behind you, the power of the imperialists can be destroyed without the use of violence.” Some delegations were unhappy with the emphasis on nonviolent resistance, especially the Algerians and Egyptians who “regarded the very word ‘nonviolence’ as an insult to brothers fighting and dying for freedom.” Ultimately, the congress declared its support for peaceful means in territories where democratic means were available but also supported those in circumstances where arms were the only protection from colonial violence. In 1959, after hearing that France planned to test nuclear weapons in the Sahara Desert at Regan, Algeria, a group of eleven Ghanaians along with British and other international activists attempted to intervene nonviolently, but were ejected from French territory in Upper Volta and ended up back in Ghana. Another conference to discuss the way forward for positive action was held in Accra in April 1960, Positive Action for Peace and Security in Africa. While Nkrumah opened the conference with a speech advocating “nonviolent positive action” as the main tactic, after the criticism of Frantz Fanon and pressure from some other African delegates, the conference’s emphasis on continent –wide nonviolent positive action was muted. Nevertheless, Bill Sutherland and Matt Meyer describe positive action as being “a phenomenal success for Gandhian strategy.” Nonviolent tactics were used as part of a self-conscious overall nonviolent strategy that led Ghana quickly to independence with minimal casualities. They included consciousness-raising among the people about their right to self-government, a determination to act in concert with each other through a variety of associations, and a willingness to accept imprisonment. Boycotts and strikes showed the people that withdrawing cooperation leaves colonial forces powerless (and that cooperation reinforces subjection). Many marginalized sectors of society were mobilized in a common cause, including the youth, market women, and elementary school graduates. Newspapers and popular songs spread the message of the movement and the leaders emphasis on the need for nonviolent discipline resonated with people’s deeply held value systems. There was the grace to accept compromise in certain situations as well as the determination to go the harder way of strikes and imprisonment when sacrifice was required. The impact of mass nonviolent civil resistance on shaping Ghanaian nationalism needs further exploration, but it is clear – if rarely acknowledged – that if facilitated this process of nation building.

#### Algeria – They tried violent resistance first and it failed but nonviolent struggle was able to dismantle colonial occupation

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(Maciej, Recovering Nonviolent History: Civil Resistance in Liberation Struggles, pg. 120)

French colonization in Algeria was one of the most intense colonial encounters of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The severity of the socioeconomic disruption caused by the colonial regime and the harsh conditions of the French colonization in Algeria (including the massacres of May 1945) limited the range of possible forms of collective activities. The face that political parties and unions developed later in Algeria than they did in other North African countries (Tunisia or Egypt) was undoubtedly linked to the breakdown of Algerian society in the face of colonization. When armed insurrections failed to repel military conquest and occupation, the population adopted strategies of persistent endurance and survival. Emigration and more muted forms of resistance, such as withdrawal into more intimate and private domains of family life, are difficult for historians to assess. It was only with the emergence of the Jeunes Algeriens and the development of cultural associations in the 1920s that this endurance took on public dimensions that were more constructive and collective. Collective activities became a means of moving away from simple survival to more proactive initiatives of rebuilding the social fabric and reinvigorating colonized society, despite ongoing restrictive and oppressive colonial policies. Political parties succeeded in drawing on a repertoire of nonviolent actions to mobilize in the nationalist cause, but their lack of unity and reluctance to use more forceful nonviolent methods such as general strikes made them ineffective in securing serious political concessions. This partly explains the teleological narrative of the Algerian history promoted by the FLN after independence. Consequently, national identity construed after the colonial war was formed on a double denial of plurality – a plurality of political ideologies and nationalist parties and their contribution to the struggle for an independent state; and a plurality in understandings of what Algerianness meant and embodied. This kind of discourse denied in its entirety the value, role, impact, and legacy of unarmed forms of collective struggle. It was only after the 1988 demonstrations, when civic associations and political parties became legal again, that the intensity of past experiences of nonviolent organizing and actions appeared reactivated: within a few days, dozens of political parties were founded. Nonviolent practices and activist networks with philosophical, institutional, and practical roots in the preindependence period were suddenly mobilized again. Thus, the decades of nationalist mythology had failed to erase them entirely.

Poland – Nonviolent resistance was the key to throw off occupation but official histories have covered these success stories up in favor of glorified violent struggle

Bartkowski 13, Senior Director at the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict

(Maciej, Recovering Nonviolent History: Civil Resistance in Liberation Struggles, pg. 274)

A critical attitude toward organic work is particularly perplexing given the extent to which the nineteenth-century nonviolent resistance and its constructive program of creating and running parallel institutions served as an inspiration for future generations of Poles faced with oppression. The conspiratorial experience of organizing and running secret education became ingrained in the collective memory of the national resistance. It was recalled during traumatic events such as the German occupation of 1939 – 1945 and during communist rule, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s when widespread illegal education (including the reestablishment of the flying university) ensured the truthful reading of national history, culture, and tradition. In fact, working at the base of society became the imperative nonviolent strategy of the anticommunist opposition. Solidarity leaders drew parallels between their nonviolent efforts to liberate the society from the control of the communist government and the nonviolent strategies of nineteenth century organicists to undermine the authority of the partitioning powers. Bohdan Cywinski’s influential Genealogy of the Defiant (1971) studied the fin-de-siecle (defiant ones) and made parallels between their nonviolent defiant attitude and practice against the czarist government and the then contemporary resistance to communism. That book inspired thousands of Poles and showed clearly how a century old tradition of nonviolent resistance – although generally underappreciated in the national annals – could play a vital role in shaping the thinking, and determining the strategies and actions, of a new generation of unarmed resisters struggling with no less oppressive autocratic rulers than their indomitable predecessors who lived under partitions. Without nonviolent resistance, Poles could not have taken charge of their national destiny after World War I or changed the geopolitical situation in their favor during the 1980s. It would have been equally implausible to integrate partitioned lands after 1918 and establish statehood so swiftly without the base of social, economic, and cultural development constructed through organic work. Although nonviolent resistance has been widely used by different generations of Poles against both external occupation and domestic dictatorship, this form of struggle is still awaiting much-deserved recognition of its role in not only defending, but essentially reimagining, the Polish nation.

### 2

#### The affirmative relies on binary thinking that blames the actions of others for suffering – the 1ac isolates the black/white binary as having its root within the practice of slavery

#### This ensures the failure of resistance and develops a culture of victimization that recreates imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy which is the foundation of all oppression

Hooks 12, Distinguished Professor in Residence at Barea

(Bell, Writing Beyond Race: Living Theory and Practice, pg. 43)

Clearly the future of diversity lies in creating greater awareness and greater critical consciousness about the importance of ending domination, of challenging and changing white supremacy. Riane Eisler urges in her partnership model that we shift from an us-versus-them attitude to a worldview where we place the “same standards of human rights and responsibilities provided by the partnership model to all cultures.” She contends: “In a world where technologies of communication and destruction span the globe almost instantaneously, creating a better world is a matter of enlightened self-interest.” Now more than ever we need to create learning communities that make learning the theory and practice of diversity essential aspects of curriculum. In my recent book Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom, I call attention to the way in which issues of diversity both inside and outside the classroom are slowly being pushed back into the realm of silence and misinformation. As I wrote: “More than ever before, students need to learn from unbiased perspectives, be they conservative or radical. More than ever before, students and teachers need to fully understand differences of nationality, race, sex, class, and sexuality if we are to create ways of knowing that reinforce education as the practice of freedom.” Learning to challenge and change binary thinking – the us-and-them paradigm – is one way to create a foundation that can be sustained. Holding onto binary thinking actually keeps dominator culture in place, for one aspect of that culture is the projection outward onto an enemy, an “other,” whenever things go wrong, and this casting of blame in turns helps to promote a culture of vicitimization. When we are more energized by the practice of blaming then we are by efforts to create transformation, we not only cannot find relief from suffering, we are creating the conditions that help keep us stuck in the status quo. Our attachment to blaming, to identifying the oppressor stems from the fear that if we cannot unequivocally and absolutely state who the enemy is then we cannot know how to organize resistance struggle. In the insightful book Ruling Your World: Ancient Strategies for Modern Life, Mipham Rinpoche talks about learning to understand others rather than blaming them. He shares: “I remember my father and other of the older generation of Tibetan lamas saying that they did not blame the Communist Chinese for the destruction of Tibet. They felt that blaming the Chinese would not solve anything. It would only trap Tibetans in the past.” Similarly, any critical examination of the history of the civil rights struggle in the United States will show that greater progress was made when leaders emphasized the importance of forgiving one’s enemies, working for reconciliation and the formation of a beloved community, rather than angry retaliation. Casting blame and calling for vengeance was an aspect of militant movements for black power that have really failed to sustain the climate of unlearning racism previously forged by nonviolent anti-racist struggle. In the aftermath of sixties rebellion, the more black folks were encouraged to vent rage, to “blame” all white folks for race-based exploitation and domination, and to eschew any notion of forgiveness, the more an internalized sense of victimhood became the norm. Tragically, today many black folks are more despairing of any possibility that racism can be effectively challenged and changed than at other similar historical moments when white supremacist aggression was more overtly life threatening. Unenlightened white folks who proclaim either that racism has ended or that they are not responsible for slavery engage in a politics of blame wherin they disavow political reality to insist that black folk are never really victims of racism but are the agents of their own suffering. Dualistic thinking, which is at the core of dominator thinking, teaches people that there is always the oppressed and the oppressor, a victim and a victimizer. Hence there is always someone to blame. Moving past the ideology of blame to a politics of accountability is a difficult move to make in a society where almost all political organizing, whether conservative or radical, has been structured around the binary of good guys and bad guys. Accountability is a much more complex issue. A politics of blame allows a contemporary white person to make statements like, “My family never owned slaves,” or “Slavery is over. Why can’t they just get over it?” In contrast, a politics of accountability would emphasize that all white people benefit from the privileges accrued from racist exploitation past and present and therefore are accountable for changing and transforming white supremacy and racism. Accountability is a more expansive concept because it opens a field of possibility where in we are all compelled to move beyond blame to see where our responsibility lies. Seeing clearly that we live within a dominator culture of imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, I am compelled to locate where my responsibility lies. In some circumstances I am in a position to be a victimizer. If I only lay claim to those aspects of the system where I define myself as the oppressed and someone else as my oppressor then I continually fail to see the larger picture. Any effort I might make to challenge domination is likely to fail if I am not looking accurately at the circumstances that create suffering, and thus seeing the larger picture. After more than thirty years of talking to folks about domination, I can testify that masses of folks in our society – both black and white – resist seeing the larger picture.

#### Conceptualizing the struggle for racial justice as resisting the oppression of black people by whites prevents reformation of white supremacist thinking which is the only way to effectively challenge racism

Hooks 12, Distinguished Professor in Residence at Barea

(Bell, Writing Beyond Race: Living Theory and Practice, pg. 23)

As long as this nation absolutely refuses to accurately name white supremacy then the roots of racism will remain strong. Ironically, even though feminist theory and cultural criticism have led to the study of whiteness and white privilege, very little of this work addresses the issue of white supremacy. When we engage a discourse that focuses on white supremacy it enables us to see ways individuals who gain no “privilege” by allegiance to white supremacist thought and action collude in the perpetuation and maintenance of this system. Here is another common racialized scenario involving children: a white girl child born blonde is constantly told by everyone she comes into contact with how beautiful she is and therefore worthy of more attention and regard than those considered less attractive. However, as the child ages, her hair begins to darken and as a consequence she is no longer the recipient of the hyper-regard shown to her as a blonde. Increasingly, she feels invisible; in some cases should would rather die than not continue her life as a blonde. Like her darker counterpart who seeks to lighten her skin with toxic bleaching cleaners, this little girl has learned that in a white supremacist context lighter is always better. In her book It’s The Little Things: Everyday Interactions That Anger, Annoy, and Divide the Races, African American journalist Lena Williams tells the story of a high-powered black friend who had purchased a house where the kitchen floor was decorated with old movie posters. Living with these images she was surprised when her four-year-old daughter announced: “Mommy, I don’t want to be black…Nobody likes black people!” Her evidence of this included the fact that there were no images of black folks in the movie posters. Her mother was astonished by this: “I hadn’t noticed that only white people were in the posters, but here was my four-year-old child – whose mommy was a lawyer and daddy a doctor – getting this message.” Williams includes this story in a chapter that discusses the way all the images that surround us, even though they may appear to be benign, often reveal the degree to which our lives are governed by an underlying ethic of white supremacy. In the growing body of critical work on whiteness there is more writing than ever before about race and aesthetics. Work that looks at the way in which the politics of white supremacy creates an aesthetic where the color and texture of hair determines value, setting standards where lighter, straighter, and longer hair equates with beauty and desirability. New work on hair like the book Big Hair informs us that only a small population of white people in the United States are born blonde and that the sad reality is that personal aesthetics rooted in white supremacist thinking can lead large numbers of white females to dye their hair blonde from their teens into adulthood. Nowadays there are segregated hair salons that specifically cater to white females desiring to be always and only blonde. Browsing any contemporary fashion magazine one sees that blondes predominate; they set the standards for what is deemed truly beautiful. While there is an ongoing discussion about the way in which white supremacist-based color caste systems create trauma in black lives, there is little discussion of the way in which these same standards create distress and trauma for white folks. Moviegoers can see a film like Chris Rock’s Good Hair and marvel at the torture and painful self-mutilation black females undergo to look “white” but do not document the torture white females face when they strive to acquire the right really white look. Even though everyone in this society is inundated with white supremacist aesthetics and will remain its victim unless we consciously choose against it, we are still encouraged to consider the issue of race as primarily a matter of black and white. Certainly it serves the serves the interest of dominator culture to promote a shallow understanding of race politics that consistently makes it appear that the issues of race in the United States solely rest on the status of darker skinned people. It may well be that the growing Hispanic population (which too is invested heavily in white supremacist aesthetics) will help push the discourse of race past issues of black and white and toward the issue of white supremacist thought and action. Every black person who talks about race has an experience where they have been interrogated about their focus on issues of black and white. Rarely does a person of color who is non-black acknowledge that the most intense forms of racial assault and discrimination in our nation have been directed primarily at black people. Professing this understanding and allegiance with black anti-racist struggles would do more to affirm challenges to white supremacy than competing for the status of who will receive more attention. The fact is when black people receive that greater attention from the dominant white society it is usually negative. Despite gains in civil rights a huge majority of white Americans and some non-black people of color continue to believe that black people are less intelligent, full of rage, and more likely to express anger with violence than all other groups. Even though negative racist stereotypes about Asian identities abound, there is no overwhelming consensus on the part of white Americans that they are incapable of intelligent rational thought. It is troubling that so many of the hateful negative stereotypes the dominant culture uses to characterize black identity are endorsed by non-black people of color. Their endorsement is an expression of collusion and solidarity with white supremacist thought and action. If all people of color and even our white allies in struggle were decolonizing their minds, challenging and changing white supremacy, they could see value in identification with blackness rather than feeling there must always be competition over who will receive the most attention from white folks. They would see clearly that the system of domination that remains oppressive and exploitative is ever ready to recruit and train as many black, brown, red, and yellow people are are needed to maintain the status quo. A thorough understanding of the complex dynamic of white supremacist thought and action would provide all citizens with a way to understand why this nation can elect a black man to be its leader and yet resist any system-wide efforts, both public and private, to challenge and change racial inequality. From the moment he entered the oval office, Obama’s actions have been continually subject to policing to ensure he does act in any way that brings particular benefits to African American citizens. Sadly, even though there have been wonderful advances in anti-discrimination-based civil rights laws and public agendas, there has been no profound effort to destroy the roots of racism. Instead we live in a society that claims via our government and public policy to condemn racial discrimination even as imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy shapes our politics and culture. Even though we have a racially integrated workforce, however relative that may be, one wherein white folks and folks of color share common ground, working together without overt strife, individuals rarely meet outside the workforce and a veneer of peace is the norm. White folks and people of color continue to negatively assess one another even though their actual lived experience of interracial connection should provide cause for them to interrogate false beliefs and assumptions. One of the sad ironies of racism in the United States is that so many black people/people of color unwittingly collude in the perpetuation of white supremacy while denouncing racism and actively speaking out against racial injustice. Most black people/people of color rarely raise the issue of white supremacy even though the values it promotes are internalized by almost everyone. Throughout the nation’s history most racialized civil rights struggle has focused on the exploitation and oppression of black people by whites. And even though more militant anti-racist struggle, like the movement for black power, called attention to internalized racism, this awareness did not become the basis for a national restructuring of anti-racist political struggle. Instead, the issues that have been raised by a focus on internalized racism (color caste hierarchies, low self-esteem, self-hatred, etc.) came to be regarded as more personal, and therefore more psychological and not truly political. During much of the militant black power movement anger and rage were the emotions anti-racist advocates fixated on as essential catalysts for liberation struggle. That highlighting of anger as a basis for resistance was far more appealing as an organizing tool than the issue of internalized racism or even a focus on self-determination.

#### Orienting resistance against imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy is a critical means of naming interlocking systems of oppression in which we are both victim and victimizer. This is critical to the creation of agency and the resistance of dominator thinking

Hooks 12, Distinguished Professor in Residence at Barea

(Bell, Writing Beyond Race: Living Theory and Practice, pg. 43)

When I first began to use the phrase imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy to characterize the interlocking systems that shape the dominator culture we live within, individuals would often tell me that they though it was just too harsh a phrase. In the past ten years, when I’ve used the phrase at lectures, more often than not audiences respond with laughter. Initially, I though this laughter was an expression of discomfort, that the true nature of our nation’s politics were being exposed. But as the laughter followed me from talk to talk I began to see it as a way to deflect attention away from the seriousness of this naming. Time and time again critical theory has taught us the power of naming accurately that which we are challenging and hoping to transform. But one way to silence accurate naming is to make it appear ridiculous, too strident, too harsh. Rarely am I asked the value of calling attention to interlocking systems of domination. Yet when we examine the cultural circumstances that provided the groundwork for facscism in the twentieth century (looking particularly at the roots of fascism in Germany, Spain, and Italy), we find similar traits in our nation (i.e., patriarchial, nationalistic, racist, religious, economic power controlled by a minority in the interests of wealth, religion, etc.). In fascist regimes, teaching populations to fear “terrorism” is one way the system garners support. Concurrently, dissident voices challenging the status quo tend to be silenced by varied forms of censorship. Most recently in our nation, the use of media to suggest that anyone who criticizes government is a traitor deserving of condemnation and even arrest effectively silences many voices. Meaningful resistance to dominator culture demands of all of us a willingness to accurately identify the various systems that work together to promote injustice, exploitation, and oppression. To name interlocking systems of domination is one way to disrupt our wrongminded reliance on dualistic thinking. Highlighted, these interlocking systems tend to indict us all in some way, making it impossible for any of us to claim that we are absolutely and always victims, calling attention to the reality of our accountability, however relative. When we are accountable, we eschew the role of victim and are able to claim the space of our individual and collective agency. For many folks, especially those who are suffering exploitation and/or oppression, that agency may seem inadequate. However, asserting agency, even in small ways, is always the first step in self-determination. It is the place of hope.

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#### Our historical re-reading of nonviolence is critical to opening new paths of powerful resistance based on a people power perspective

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(Maciej, Recovering Nonviolent History: Civil Resistance in Liberation Struggles, pg. 4)

The study of civil resistance presented here represents a paradigmatic shift in the understanding of national struggles and the making of nation-states, which moves away from the traditional focus on structures, conditions, processes, military power, violence, and political elites. This investigation approaches historical knowledge in a novel fashion, recognizing that the force that shapes nations and propels their resistance lies in the organized, purposeful, and defiant actions of an unarmed population. Its nonstate alternative to understanding political power goes against the established Weberian canon of political authority that is top down, centralized, static, material, and elite or institution centric. Instead, the people power perspective emphasizes the fragility and diffused nature of political power, its outside-of-the-state origin, and the agency of ordinary people. Regimes are sustained not merely by their material power, including mechanisms of coercion, but also or primarily by the apathy or ignorance of the common people. The dormant people power becomes apparent with a sudden or gradual collective withdrawal of consent and mass disobedience. This force, according to Mohandas Gandhi (Mahatma), gains its strength from the fact that “even the most powerful cannot rule without the co-operation of the ruled.”

#### The affirmatives discourse of empowerment under conditions of repression creates the potential for violent resistance – replicates David and Goliath logic

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(Dana, “David, Goliath, and the Black Panthers: The Paradox of the Oppressed Militant in the Rhetoric of Self-Defense,” Journal of Communication Inquiry 37(1))

Both the Hebrew Bible and the Qur’an tell the story of David and Goliath, in which David, a youth armed only with stones and a sword, challenges and kills the giant Goliath, thus securing the victory of the Israelites over the Philistines. The event was a military victory; it also created and secured the identity of a people with a sense of its own power. Today the phrase “David and Goliath” is used as shorthand to refer to a situation in which a smaller or significantly weaker force defeats a larger and much more powerful one. In this article, we develop a framework for examining the David and Goliath narrative when it is used as a rhetorical strategy in political and social movement discourse. We argue that the stance of the aggrieved Party (David) is a rhetorical resource that serves two functions for both mainstream political and oppositional social movement actors. First, it potentially legitimizes the use of violence in a social conflict by figuring political collectives as aggrieved victims. Second, it crafts a paradoxical collective persona: that of an oppressed militant (in the case of social movements) or a mighty victim (in the case of hegemonic powers), an agent who is at once both powerful and oppressed. It is beyond the scope of this article to analyze in detail the disparate treatment by the media of oppressed militants (framed negatively) and the hegemonic stance of “righteous victim” used to justify wars against weaker foes (framed positively). However, we make a note of this distinction’s importance toward the conclusion of this article. Elsewhere (Cloud & Gatchet, 2008), we argue that mainstream mass media and, by extension, the publics they influence, tacitly and problematically regard the violence of established powerful entities as more credible than self-defense among oppressed groups. Here we focus on the first dimension of the David and Goliath narrative by exploring the rhetoric of militancy among the oppressed as developed by members of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. While there is extensive research about rhetorics warranting the violence of nation states, there is less research addressing the questions: How do movements for social change by oppressed groups warrant their turn to violence? What functions does a movement’s claim to the right of self-defense serve in the creation of the identity of its participants? Finally, how do dominant interests and mainstream media take up movement arguments about violence, and with what consequences? In order to answer these questions, we examine the rhetoric and U.S. news media framing of the Black Panthers during the late 1960s.1 Based on this analysis, we argue that members of the Black Panther Party (BPP) rhetorically crafted a David-like persona to warrant the taking up of arms in self-defense. The Panthers utilized the David stance in their rhetoric of self-defense in two distinct ways. First, Panthers advocated armed self-defense as a necessary and righteous move against an invading and exploitative, even monstrous, enemy. Second, and perhaps more importantly, members of the Party recognized their militant stance as one that allowed Black Americans to define themselves as an oppressed but potentially powerful group. This latter strategy is characteristic of the construction of an agentive identity for social movements against oppression. However, mainstream media outlets often framed the BPP as a Goliath like threat, ignoring or diminishing Panther grievances regarding the systematic oppression faced by members of inner-city Black communities at the hands of state and local police and often describing the BPP movement as equal with these dominant governmental powers in its assumption of the prerogative of violence. We argue that these frames are significant in managing the public meaning of political violence, from social movements and assassination attempts to terrorism and preemptive war.

### AT: Gelderloos

#### Gelderloos is attacking a strawperson – his critique of nonviolence is a highly selective view that ignores the majority of scholarship and history

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(Brian, How nonviolence is misrepresented, http://www.bmartin.cc/pubs/08gm2.html#\_edn1)

Since the days of Gandhi's campaigns, nonviolent activists have been criticised by supporters of armed struggle.[48] In recent years, the most comprehensive critiques of nonviolence have been by Howard Ryan,[49] Ward Churchill[50] and Gelderloos. Unfortunately, many critiques suffer through inadequate understanding of nonviolence, often due to a failure to engage with writings in the area.[51] Gelderloos has shown enormous commitment as an activist and great energy in compiling a comprehensive critique of nonviolence. Unfortunately, he has missed his main target: in essence, he attacks principled nonviolence from a perspective in which the ends justify the means. He dismisses nonviolent action campaigns using a set of arguments that display systematic double standards. Underlying Gelderloos' argument is the assumption that violence is more effective than nonviolence. This is certainly a common assumption, but if a critique of nonviolence is to have any real teeth, the assumption needs to be justified and counterexamples addressed. Gelderloos shows almost no awareness of the pragmatic tradition in nonviolent action. He misrepresents nonviolent action as consisting solely of protest and persuasion, missing the more coercive methods of noncooperation and intervention. Furthermore, he ignores a large number of major nonviolent struggles, successful and unsuccessful. A key omission in Gelderloos' argument is a discussion of limits in a diversity of tactics: he does not say whether any methods should be ruled out. Almost any activist will agree that some methods should not be used, whether it is assassination, land mines or biological weapons. The question then becomes where to draw the line.

#### Gelderloos relies on selective misleading use of evidence – following his strategy ensures mass violence and resistance failure

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(Brian, How nonviolence is misrepresented, http://www.bmartin.cc/pubs/08gm2.html#\_edn1)

Gelderloos often uses sources in a selective, misleading fashion. For example, he criticises an article by Carol Flinders about women and nonviolence, incorrectly portraying it as saying women are inherently nonviolent.[34] He cites Martha McCaughey's book Real Knockouts, an analysis of the women's self-defence movement, in support of his argument for women's violence against patriarchy, missing the complexity and sophistication of McCaughey's argument.[35] Gelderloos approvingly quotes (pp. 114-115) Martin Oppenheimer's book The Urban Guerrilla concerning shortcomings of nonviolence but omits any mention of Oppenheimer's trenchant criticisms of violence, such as: "For the organization of violence, for whatever reason, is basically subversive of democratic values and institutions, and the habit of solving political issues through violent means, far from liberating, imprisons persons and personalities so that truly democratic participation in decision-making become nearly impossible." "... the kind of people who become active in insurrections and survive it tend not to be the kind of people who will create a positive, humanistic order ... the kind of organization seemingly required to conduct a violent effort is inherently subversive of such an order." "... both in terms of personality and organization, violence, far from being therapeutic, endangers when it does not utterly destroy the humanistic component of a social movement."[36] Violence: What Sort and How Much? How Nonviolence Protects the State is curiously coy about the actual role violence might play in liberation. Gelderloos explicitly rejects presenting a definition of violence: "... one of the critical arguments of this book is that violence cannot be clearly defined." (p. 3). He says that many activists consider everyday activities, such as "buying clothes made in a sweatshop", to be violent and says the concept of violence isn't useful when "no two people can really agree on what it means" (pp. 124-125). However, even though activists may have different conceptions about terms, it's still possible for analysts to agree on meanings. Gelderloos, by leaving violence ill-defined, is able to avoid spelling out what he sees as the appropriate or inappropriate use of violence in liberation. He prefers to focus on hierarchy as the key to oppression and to say that all means of challenging hierarchy should be considered, without bothering about the difference between violence and nonviolence. He advocates a diversity of tactics, assuming that the more tactics are available to be used, the more effective a movement can be. Because a commitment to nonviolence means ruling out some tactics, Gelderloos concludes that nonviolence is bound to be less effective than a broader diversity of tactics. There are a few clues in the text about what sorts of actions Gelderloos is thinking about: "fighting cops or engaging in clandestine acts of sabotage" (p. 4); "violent protests, bombings, and property destruction" (p. 15) "hits a cop or throws a brick through a window" (p. 58) "Killing a cop who rapes homeless transgender people and prostitutes, burning down the office of a magazine that consciously markets a beauty standard that leads to anorexia and bulimia, kidnapping the president of a company that conducts women-trafficking" (p. 67) "blow up a dioxin-emitting factory that is making your breast milk toxic"; "kill the general who sends out the soldiers who rape women in a war zone" (p. 69) "expropriate money to fund and greatly increase the capacities of grassroots media outlets" (p. 90). The question arises: are there any methods that Gelderloos rejects? Does he reject use of machine guns? Does he reject missiles? Does he reject biological weapons? Does he reject nuclear weapons? Does he reject torture?[37] If Gelderloos rejects any of these methods, perhaps because they are inhumane or counterproductive, then he is drawing a line, accepting that not all methods are acceptable in a diversity of tactics. One of Gelderloos' chief complaints is that nonviolent activists are unwilling to support activists who use violence. Is Gelderloos willing to support any activist, even ones who use land mines and chemical weapons? If not, then his strictures against nonviolent activists, who draw a line at a different place, reflect a double standard in his argument.

### AT: Self Defense Justifies

#### Focusing on justifications for violence distracts form a focus on strategy success – you should privilege effectiveness over principle

Martin, 8 --- Professor of Social Sciences at the University of Wollongong, Australia (July-September 2008, Brian, Gandhi Marg, “How NonViolence is Misrepresented,” vol. 30, no. 2, <http://www.uow.edu.au/~bmartin/pubs/08gm2.html)>)

Is Challenger Violence Justified?

Gelderloos frequently highlights the violence of the state - "the greatest purveyor of violence" (p. 158) - and other systems of oppression, with the implicit assumption that this justifies violence to destroy these systems. The issue of the legitimacy receives quite a lot of attention in discussions of violence. William T. Vollmann in his mammoth analysis of violence, Rising Up and Rising Down, focuses on justifications for and consequences of violence, and includes a detailed moral calculus.[27]

But just because violence might be justified does not mean it is the best option. If someone at a party swears at you, you might be legally and morally justified in suing for slander, but it is seldom a wise idea to do so: it is likely to be very costly and could harm your reputation even more.[28] Similarly for violence: although justified, it might be counterproductive in legitimising counter-violence, reducing participation, and leading down a path towards more violence. This highlights, once again, the importance of careful comparisons of the effectiveness of violence and nonviolence, taking into account both immediate outcomes and longer-term impacts on morale, solidarity and mobilisation.

#### Violence is not neutral can’t be selectively used --- nonviolence produces more effective social movements

Martin, 8 --- Professor of Social Sciences at the University of Wollongong, Australia (July-September 2008, Brian, Gandhi Marg, “How NonViolence is Misrepresented,” vol. 30, no. 2, <http://www.uow.edu.au/~bmartin/pubs/08gm2.html)>)

The Case for Nonviolent Action Through history classes, Hollywood movies and the daily news, most people come to believe two things about violence. One is that groups with a greater capacity for violence - armies, weapons, military industry and ruthlessness - can nearly always win over those with a lesser capacity. This is the assumption behind the question "What would you do to stop the Nazis?" asked rhetorically as a presumed refutation of nonviolence.[2] Second, most people believe that violence is a tool, usually a neutral tool. If it is used by bad guys - the enemy, terrorists or criminals - violence is bad, but when used by good guys - "our side" - then it is good. Most supporters of revolutionary warfare accept these assumptions: they believe revolution is a good cause and hope to use armed struggle to achieve it. Nonviolent action challenges both these assumptions: the successes of nonviolent action challenge the belief that superior violence always succeeds; the characteristics of nonviolent action make it an especially appropriate tool for helping create a nonviolent society. Mohandas Gandhi was the key figure in creating awareness of nonviolent action as a distinctive approach to social change, principally through campaigns in South Africa beginning in 1906 and then in India from 1915 through the 1940s. Nonviolent action had been used for centuries before Gandhi. For example, Hungarians who opposed domination by Austria used a range of methods of noncooperation from 1850 to 1867.[3] One of Gandhi's achievements was to put nonviolent action on the agenda as a strategic approach. Gandhi's campaigns had an enormous influence worldwide, leading to the development and diffusion of nonviolent campaigning skills and insights. In many social movements, nonviolent action has become the preferred approach.

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#### The affirmative puts resistance before rethinking – this ensures a counterproductive struggle that looks like it alleviates oppression in one area but actually increases it more in other areas

Hooks 12, Distinguished Professor in Residence at Barea

(Bell, Writing Beyond Race: Living Theory and Practice, pg. 43)

Even though origin stories which find the invention of patriarchy to be the root of domination may seem inaccurate, what is true is that in dominator culture the family is one of the primary pedagogical locations for the teaching of dominator thought and practice via the acceptance and perpetuation of patriarchy. Hence, working to challenge and change patriarchy continues to be essential to any effort to transform dominator culture. Progressive folks, especially prominent male thinkers and activists on the left, openly denounce imperialism, racism and capitalism but rarely talk about the need to challenge patriarchy. And while all people of color, all black people, are socialized to embrace white supremacist thinking, few, if any, individuals from these constituents openly advocate racism. Individual black people who straighten their hair because they have been taught to believe their natural hair texture is ugly are perpetuating a white supremacist aesthetic even as they may be adamantly anti-racism. These contradictions reveal the myriad ways dominator culture shapes our thoughts and actions in ways that are unconscious. It is precisely because dominator thinking is so deeply embedded in our psyches that efforts to decolonize minds through the cultivation of critical consciousness needs to be an essential aspect of resistance struggle. When individuals who are psychologically confused engage in resistance struggle, they often are dysfunctional and act out in ways that undermine or negate their efforts to create constructive change. Since dominator culture relies on interlocking systems (imperialism, white supremacy, capitalism, patriarchy) to sustain itself, it seeks to cover up the connections between these systems. Or it allows for only one aspect of the system to be challenged at a time: for example, allowing anti-racist critiques while silencing anti-capitalist or anti-sexist voices.

#### The affirmatives move towards the self fails by derailing political action – there is a direct trade off between an individual focus and collective material struggle

Cloud 98, Professor of Communication Studies at U of Texas

(Dana, Control and Consolation in American Culture and Politics, pg. xiv)

In response to what Susan Faludi has called an antifeminist backlash in popular culture and politics, feminist activist Gloria Steinem came out with a new plan for a “revolution from within” based on self-esteem. Family support groups were more prominent than antiwar activism during the Persian Gulf War, and former Marxists and feminists have, since the collapse of Stalinism, hailed a politics of self-expression, consciousness-raising, and social fragmentation as the new avenue for change. Meanwhile, psychotherapists have taken to the airwaves, as talk show hosts with the help of talk show psychologists, attempt to resolve their guests’ conflicts in the space of minutes. Talk show producer Mary Duffy explained to a New York Times reporter that the therapists are there to “help the audience, too” (Berger 1995, 33). To help the audience with what? Although popularized therapy claims to help individual people with their personal problems, the discourse of therapy serves a broader, cultural function for mass audiences: to offer psychological ministration for the ills of society. A common argument (Flacks 1988, Lasch 1979, Loeb 1994) suggests that since the Vietnam War, American culture and the American people have lost sight of political and social commitment and public responsibility in the narcissistic pursuit of individual interests. As Christopher Lasch wrote more than 15 year ago, “After the political turmoil of the sixties, Americans have retreated to purely personal preoccupations” (29). Scholars and activists on the Left should take warning: What were once political movements have become translated into personal quests for fulfillment. My argument about this social transformation stands in contrast to other perspectives on the therapeutic. Unlike communitarians (Left and Right), who see the retreat into narcissism as a moral failure of our culture, I regard the therapeutic as a political strategy of contemporary capitalism, by which potential dissent is contained within a discourse of individual or family responsibility. Against postmodernists who celebrate the atomization of contemporary culture and proclaim the death of mass collective action for social change, I see a real need to repoliticize issues of power as a precondition for renewed oppositional social movement organizing. In contrast to scholars of liberalism who applaud therapy’s near-exclusive emphasis on individual initiative and personal responsibility, my argument insists on acknowledging the collective and structural features of an unequal social reality in which individuals are embedded and out of which our personal experience, in large part, derives. Racism, sexism, and capitalism pose significant obstacles to individual mobility and well-being; their roles in structuring social reality, however, are obscured in therapeutic discourses that locate the ill not with the society but with the individual or private family. The goals of this book are to develop and argue for a materialist rhetoric of therapy that locates the emergence of therapeutic discourse at a particular historical moment, to link the rise of the therapeutic with particular political and economic interests, and to describe the specific mechanisms by which the therapeutic is a persuasive part of our culture.

#### The personal is not political enough – it makes resistance to oppression impossible by tricking people into thinking that self-transformation can lead to macro level change

Levitas 03, Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Bristol

(Ruth, Dark Horizons, pg. 23 – 24)

I do not for a moment deny that the utopian spaces of intentional communities may allow different, better relations between people, although, as you observe, they may also be sites of oppression and exploitation. But the existence of these spaces does not seem to me to constitute any major challenge to the more generally dystopian character of political culture. Indeed, the emphasis on the self, the individual, and the private seems to me to be linked to a wider political apathy, and a sense that we can really alter only this micro-level. The dystopian genre is often critical of capitalism: there’s a widespread view that things are not OK, but we live in a culture in which there is no confidence that that things can be otherwise, so utopian energies are restricted to very personal levels. Oliver Bennett describes this as cultural pessimism and draws attention to the prevalence of narratives of economic, moral, and ecological decline. In short, the personal is not political enough. I’m unconvinced about the translation of micro-changes into macro-changes. My quest for Utopia is based on a wish to be different myself, as well as that the world should be otherwise; and I want the world to be otherwise partly because this seems to be a precondition for recovering my own humanity. The danger of this position is that is passes off responsibility for who I am onto external structures and neglects the extent to which, as you say, Utopia is part of the process that must be entered into now, rather than postponed always beyond the horizon. The converse problem is thinking that we can live in what Colin Davis called a Perfect Moral Commonwealth, in which the negative effects of structures are canceled out by individual moral action. Clearly, one must work at both levels. But the general conditions for transformed relations between self and other include a level of material security that capitalism, by its very nature, denies to all but a few.

#### A focus on the politics of the self prevents material demands that are necessary to alleviate racial inequality

Harris 14, Director of the Center on African-American Politics and Society at Columbia

(Fredrick, Winter, The Rise of Respectability Politics, Dissent, Vol. 61, Number 1)

What started as a philosophy promulgated by black elites to “uplift the race” by correcting the “bad” traits of the black poor has now evolved into one of the hallmarks of black politics in the age of Obama, a governing philosophy that centers on managing the behavior of black people left behind in a society touted as being full of opportunity. In an era marked by rising inequality and declining economic mobility for most Americans—but particularly for black Americans—the twenty-first-century version of the politics of respectability works to accommodate neoliberalism. The virtues of self-care and self-correction are framed as strategies to lift the black poor out of their condition by preparing them for the market economy. For more than half of the twentieth century, the concept of the “Talented Tenth” commanded black elites to “lift as we climb,” or to prove to white America that blacks were worthy of full citizenship rights by getting the untalented nine-tenths to rid themselves of bad customs and habits. Today’s politics of respectability, however, commands blacks left behind in post–civil rights America to “lift up thyself.” Moreover, the ideology of respectability, like most other strategies for black progress articulated within the spaces where blacks discussed the best courses of action for black freedom, once lurked for the most part beneath the gaze of white America. But now that black elites are part of the mainstream elite in media, entertainment, politics, and the academy, respectability talk operates within the official sphere, shaping the opinions, debates, and policy perspectives on what should—and should not—be done on the behalf of the black poor. [End Page 33] The late Howard University professor Rayford W. Logan identified the turn of the twentieth century as the “nadir” of the civil rights of black Americans since the abolition of slavery in 1865. This era saw adverse Supreme Court decisions, the Republican Party’s abandonment of the cause of civil rights, neglectful presidents, and a hostile Congress lead to the collapse of Reconstruction and erode the progress that black Americans had gained in the years after emancipation. Similar patterns in the nation’s body politic could lead us to consider the current moment a nadir since the heyday of the civil rights movement, even if the parallels are not exactly the same. Supreme Court decisions against affirmative action have been taking place for at least the past two decades, and the decision this past summer on the Voting Rights Act has severely weakened one of the most successful pieces of legislation to evolve from the civil rights movement. The Republican majority in the House of Representatives is controlled by a small faction connected to the Tea Party, which is hostile to any agenda that is proposed by civil rights organizations, the Congressional Black Caucus, and particularly the president. The Republican Party’s attempt to nullify Obama’s presidency and his prized social policy accomplishment, the Affordable Care Act, are acts of political sabotage that are unprecedented in recent memory. But Obama’s general silence on issues of race and poverty has also contributed to the current malaise in black politics. The president seems to be committed only to social policies “that help everyone,” rather than also considering targeted policies that address the conditions of poor black and Latino communities. As president he has spoken less in his first term (particularly during his first two years in office) on issues of race and poverty than any Democratic president in a generation or more. In 1895, as the economic, social, and political progress that black Americans had made under Reconstruction was being chipped away, Booker T. Washington chastised black America in his “Atlanta Compromise” speech for being “ignorant and inexperienced,” seeking political representation in Congress rather than acquiring “real estate or industrial skill,” and attending political conventions and speeches rather than “starting a dairy farm or truck garden.” He declared that, as blacks, “we should not permit our grievances to overshadow our opportunities.” In the age of Obama, such sentiments are once again on the rise. Indeed, the current incarnation of the politics of respectability—where uplift entails transforming individuals rather than transforming communities—is one of the most undetected developments in black politics since the freedom movement. On the eve of the 2008 election, a poll by ABC News/Columbia University Center on African-American Politics and Society asked whether blacks thought that they should spend more time gaining political power or building economic power. Sixty-two percent reported that building economic power was more important, while 24 percent believed that political power was, even though another question in the survey documented that blacks felt that they had less political power than whites. These findings highlight the yearning for economic uplift in black communities, which suggests why the politics of respectability has such mass appeal across social classes. Even though respectability evolved as an elite ideology, it operates as common sense in most quarters of black America. Indeed, it even has its own lexicon. The word “ghetto,” for instance, which a generation ago was used to describe poor, segregated neighborhoods, is now used to characterize the “unacceptable” behavior of black people who live anywhere from a housing project to an affluent suburb. Economic power is a needed development, of course, and one that can be used to leverage political power. But the politics of respectability has been portrayed as an emancipatory strategy to the neglect of discussions about structural forces that hinder the mobility of the black poor and working class. One recent example of respectability standing in for policy to address social ills could be heard in a speech given by Philadelphia mayor Michael Nutter on August 7, 2011 at Mount Carmel Baptist Church. The speech was delivered in the aftermath of a violent flash mob, which numbered several hundred black youths, that destroyed property and physically assaulted innocent bystanders in the city’s business and commercial center. Nutter rightly addressed the issue of public safety and responded to the violence by declaring a curfew for teens. He also promised to criminalize parents whose children break the law. In the timeworn tradition, the mayor then began to browbeat black youth by proclaiming to the black churchgoers that the mob had “made shame on our race.” If you want all of us—black, white, or any other color—if you want us to respect you, if you want us to look at you in a different way, if you want us not to be afraid to walk down the same side of the street with you, if you want folks not to jump out of the elevator when you get on, if you want folks to stop following you around in stores when you’re out shopping, if you want somebody to offer you a job or an internship somewhere, if you don’t want folks to be looking in or trying to go in a different direction when they see two or twenty of you coming down the street, then stop acting like idiots and fools, out in the streets of the city of Philadelphia. “And another thing,” the mayor thundered, “take those doggone hoodies down, especially in the summer.” “Pull your pants up,” he said as members of the congregation chimed in to help finish his thoughts, “and buy a belt, because no one wants to see your underwear or the crack of your butt.” Members of the church stood and chanted, “Buy a belt, buy a belt!” Nutter’s thirty-minute talk neglected to mention the lack of opportunities for black youth in his city; the national unemployment rate for black sixteen-to-nineteen-year-olds now hovers around 30 percent, and in cities like Philadelphia and New York it is closer to 40 percent. Nor did Nutter speak to the severe budget cuts to public services that have occurred under his administration, particularly in the city’s division of parks and recreation. Nor did he consider the difficulties that children faced in Philadelphia’s public school system, which is rated among the worst in the nation and is so fiscally stressed that in September the city threatened to keep schools closed when the school year began Though respectability talk has been employed by many black mayors over the past decades to address declining black educational achievement and criminality, its use by nationally recognized black entertainers, journalists, community leaders, and politicians—a diverse group that includes comedians Bill Cosby and Chris Rock, CNN anchor Don Lemon, and President Obama, among others—is gaining greater currency in a moment of stalled economic progress for black America. This shift was evident during “Advancing the Dream,” a live show on the cable news network MSNBC that commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Hosted by the Reverend Al Sharpton at Harlem’s Apollo Theater, the program did not focus its viewers on political agendas or strategies, or on the need for black America to continue to press for change. Instead, it highlighted up-from-the-ghetto stories told mostly by black celebrities and businesspeople. Former NBA player and entrepreneur Earvin “Magic” Johnson, filmmaker Tyler Perry, entertainer Stevie Wonder, and Sharpton, among others, offered homilies. Sharpton asked Perry, who grew up in poverty, what prevented him from “going down the wrong road” and why he chose “to be something rather than nothing.” Perry attributed his success to his praying mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother; the community of elders who kept watch over him; and the inspiration of billionaire Oprah Winfrey. Given the sacrifices and personal struggles of the previous generations, Perry inserted, “I would be a fool to walk around with my pants around my ankles and chains” [End Page 35] around his neck, behaviors that do no more than “slap” the previous generations of black people in the face by “talking about ‘Yo, Yo, Yo I’m a thug.’” Magic Johnson talked about his dreams of becoming an entrepreneur growing up in Lansing, Michigan and the lessons his father gave him on how to manage racial slights. When Sharpton asked how he overcame his discovery that he was infected with HIV/AIDS, Johnson’s answer fit nicely into the theme of self-correction as liberation. “Just because you get knocked down does not mean you have to lay [sic] there,” he said. Like Perry, he acknowledged the “village” that helped raise him, and his responsibility to help lift those who are left behind by forming businesses that employ black people. What is written out of this success story is how his father’s unionized job at an auto plant and his mother’s public-sector job (as a cafeteria worker) helped to provide the stable employment that accorded him a better life. The only speaker to disrupt the rags-to-riches narratives was the public intellectual Michael Eric Dyson, who told the story of his brother, a prison inmate serving time for murder. Though Dyson acknowledged that his brother, by his own admission, had made some “self-destructive choices,” Dyson also mentioned how social barriers and structural forces placed greater disadvantages on his brother than on him. Noting how his light-skin privilege allowed him to receive more support than his darker-skin sibling, Dyson said he was encouraged by many for his intellect while his brother, who was equally bright, was seen as someone who may not live up to his potential. Dyson, like Perry and Johnson, emphasized the importance of religion in his life. But he also acknowledged the importance of government-sponsored youth programs—like the Comprehensive Employment Training Act—that allowed him to get a job and learn valuable skills early in life. He also acknowledged the political struggle of the previous generations of activists—people like Martin Luther King, Jesse Jackson, and Ella Baker—that had transformed the United States into a more just society. “I don’t damn young people for having low-slung drawers,” Dyson quipped; “raise up their dreams and their drawers will follow.” But Dyson’s insights were lost in a chorus of triumphalism. Stevie Wonder ended the program with a rousing rendition of the civil rights anthem “We Shall Overcome,” replacing the verb “shall” in the lyrics with “have,” as in, “We Have Overcome.” The problem is not that the stories told by black elites are a source of inspiration, but the political handiwork these narratives do for neoliberalism. Uplifting stories that leave out structural barriers, let alone the need for political struggle to correct those barriers, can gloss over the enormous challenges the poor face in an era marked by downward mobility. Respectability politics can have the effect of steering “unrespectables” away from making demands on the state to intervene on their behalf and toward self-correction and the false belief that the market economy alone will lift them out of their plight.