

Duquesne University Duquesne Scholarship Collection

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

2016

Decolonizing Revelation: A Spatial Reading of the Blues

Rufus Burnett Jr.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dsc.duq.edu/etd>

Recommended Citation

Burnett, R. (2016). Decolonizing Revelation: A Spatial Reading of the Blues (Doctoral dissertation, Duquesne University). Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/etd/368>

This Immediate Access is brought to you for free and open access by Duquesne Scholarship Collection. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Duquesne Scholarship Collection. For more information, please contact phillipsg@duq.edu.

DECOLONIZING REVELATION:
A SPATIAL READING OF THE BLUES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Rufus Burnett, Jr.

May 2016

Copyright by
Rufus Burnett, Jr.

2016

DECOLONIZING REVELATION:
A SPATIAL READING OF THE BLUES

By

Rufus Burnett, Jr.

Approved April 1, 2015

Dr. Gerald Boodoo
Associate Professor of Theology
(Committee Chair)

Dr. Elisabeth Vasko
Associate Professor Theology
(Committee Member)

Dr. Elochukwu Uzukwu
Professor of Theology
(Committee Member)

James Swindal, Ph.D.
Dean, McAnulty Graduate School of
Liberal Arts
Professor of Chemistry and
Biochemistrv

Dr. Maureen O'Brien,
Chair, Systematic Theology
Associate Professor of Theology

ABSTRACT

DECOLONIZING REVELATION: A SPATIAL READING OF THE BLUES

By

Rufus Burnett, Jr.

May 2016

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Gerald Boodoo

Decolonizing Revelation: A Spatial Reading of the Blues demonstrates that the cultural phenomenon of the blues is an indigenous way of knowing that offsets the hidden logic of racialized dominance within modern Christian understandings of revelation. In distinction from the Christian, Religious, and racialized understandings of the blues, this dissertation focuses on the space in which the blues emerges, the Delta Region of the United States. By attending to space, this dissertation shows how critical consideration of geography and region can reveal nuances that are often veiled behind racialized and theologized ways of understanding the people of the Delta Region. Reading the blues in space discloses the ways in which the blues dislocates the confines of interpreters that label it a racialized phenomenon on one hand, and “the devils music” on the other. By

wresting the blues from colonialist and racist logics, this dissertation contends that the space that produces the blues can be recovered as a viable resource for reimagining a theology of revelation.

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to

The Delta and its Peoples

Christine Brown-Burnett

Gordon Brown

Lillie Winters

Lavern Winters

Phillip J. Linden, Jr.

and

Jessica Sherlette Hughes-Burnett

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation speaks primarily with the knowledge in the blues. But the voice found within this work resonates with sounds that are beyond the limits of the written word. It is in vibration with many other sounds, spaces and persons that I have found the ability to push out this mediation of the blues. At every turn I have learned just how insufficient words are in trying to communicate the God talk present in blues people. These acknowledgements are no different; they too are insufficient. Nevertheless, I must take this moment to recognize the many contributions to my intellectual and spiritual development which came together in the making of this theological reflection on the blues. It is only with the sounds of loved ones, family, colleagues, teachers and mentors that these words have found their pitch.

To the land of the Delta Region I offer this text as a prayer to the deep sense of Divine grace that remains hidden beneath the death of the Mississippian Peoples, the enslavement of Africans, the commodification of the land and the marginalization of those small farmers from Europe. I pray that these words have done justice to the deep loss experienced by the soil, forests, rivers, streams and species of the Delta. As a child, I experienced your dirt and clay after so much plunder had commenced on your terrain. Thank you for teaching me to sit with the beauty of the Divine that vibrates in the dirt of your body.

To those blues peoples nearest to me, Lillie and Lavern Winters, Christine Brown-Burnett and Gordon Brown, I thank you for gifting to me, through the lives of

my parents, a respect for the land. Thank you for your labor with the soil and for your deep connection with the species of the land. Your sacrifice in the face of immense struggle and violence has not gone unnoticed and these words have been an attempt to step beyond what I can only remember as a playground of hog pins, tire swings, chickens, citrus trees, cotton fields and small gardens overflowing with beans, corn, cucumbers and tomatoes. Through this work I have found the grace of the Divine that existed in the life worlds you made as the second generation of free black American peoples. For guiding me through this way of life I give you back not only these words, but my life. Use me as you see fit to remind a decadent humanity of the wisdom that comes from sensing the life vibrations of dirt, water, and sun.

To my parents, Sarah Alice Burnett and Rufus Burnett Sr., thank you for holding onto the values imparted by our ancestors and having the courage to gift them to me. Chief amongst these values is a respect for the Divine and grit. Mom, thank you for the forced trips to prayer meeting early on Saturday mornings. While you laid me on the pew to slumber, I never slept. I was caught up in the sounds of a people lifting up an entire community in prayer. There were many times where the vibration was so intense that it felt that my body would physically leave the pew. In a strange way it was my sitting with the moans and shouts of prayer meetings that I became sensitive to the sonic world of black American spirituality. It was in your voice that I learned to look up, down, out and around to God. Your commitment to so many souls as a preacher, teacher, friend and sister is the starting point of my theological curiosity. I can still hear your voice, whispering scriptures before bed and lifting prayers from behind the door of your bedroom. In these whispers I first

heard the sound of reverence. To my father, I thank you for teaching me struggle and grit. For all those nights at the ball park when you hit me fly balls, or pitched to me from the mound of an empty ball park, I am eternally grateful. These were lessons of self-mastery that found their way into sentences and paragraphs. I am still, “Watching the threads of life’s baseballs, catching the spin of the laces, pushing off my back foot, moving my hands to the ball, making contact and following through.” The grit that carries me was made in your commitment to baseball diamonds, homework, and kitchen table seminars. You never let me feel the ease and comfort of complacency. These were luxuries that you knew could prove dangerous and a threat to those who made degrading myths about the melanin that adorns our skin.

To my younger siblings, Allison and Daniel, there are many days that I hoped that my life in the struggles of graduate school would be an inspiration to you both. However, it has been me who has been inspired by watching both of you face your own struggles. Your robust commitments to community, faith, family, and self-mastery have been a constant inspiration to me and I am so proud of what you both have stirred in me and others. With my siblings I must include my kin and fictive kin who have often acted as brothers and sisters. I am thankful for all of their love and support, but since they are legion, I can only mention a few here. To Devaki Magee, Michael Winters, Brad Bradford and Bobby James Smith I want to thank you for being an ear on the phone on days when I needed to vent, double over in laughter, or just hear an encouraging word. Your care for me, through dance, visits, phone calls, and text messages cannot be overstated.

To Steven J. Battin and Malik Joe David Sales, I hope that this work serves as a testament to the long conversations we have had over the years about returning the theological thought of black Americans towards a more cosmological and indigenous horizon. This piece of writing would not be possible without your constant encouragement as fellow theologians dedicated to the work sparked in us by our common mentor, Dr. Phillip J. Linden. Thank you both for your willingness to laugh with me, read pages, offer critiques, suggest articles, and most importantly, for being elder brothers to me. It is in our exchanges, not only about theology, but about the rigors of living through the dissertation process, that I was able to complete this current work. Joe, in addition to all of this I want to thank you for your constant offering of music. Hearing your music helped me push the keys of the laptop on days when my fingers were defiant to the work at hand. Steven, I want to thank you for sending me what I call the seed of this dissertation— the work of Anibal Quijano. What is so significant about your gift to me is that you sent it as a way to keep me motivated at a time when I was losing hope in my goal of pursuing the PhD in theology. Just as I was turning my attention elsewhere, the Quijano text sparked my query into decolonial thought. Who knew that the work of Quijano and others would be my main theoretical interlocutors? For all of these gifts of friendship and human care I am eternally grateful to you both.

In addition to these two elders in my theological family, I must mention my contemporaries Malik J.M. Walker and Joseph Drexler-Dries. Across waters, time, and space both of you have been an inspiration and a constant well of encouragement. To my theological sisters and brothers at Duquesne University,

John Odeyemi, Ximena Debroek, Emmanuel Ahua, Emmanuel Osigwe, and Martin Ahiaba, I thank you dearly for prayers, lunches, coffees and the constant rigorous exchange that we mustered in our seminars together. I have learned from you all and I know that the dissertation would not have been possible without our times in Fisher Hall.

I am also grateful to those who served as unofficial outside readers from other fields. Matthew Quest and Judith Weisenfeld have both sent me down the rabbit hole of material history and have assisted me in my endeavor to better paint the life world of blues peoples. Judith Weisenfeld alerted me to history of religions scholar John Giggie who became a critical source for the dissertation. Matthew Quest, through insightful conversations laced with political wisdom, wit, and what can only be described as tragic comedy pointed me to the treasures of Albert Murray and Steven Hahn-- two sources that also proved to be indispensable. More than a reader and a source, Quest and his partner Martha have been family and fellow travelers on the march to change the world through the capabilities of everyday people.

To Phillip J. Linden Jr., my first theological teacher, I thank you for introducing me to the deep mysteries of the Divine that exist in the worlds of those deemed disposable by modernity. You are a powerful intellect and a masterful pedagogue. The many lessons that flowed from you and the faculty at Xavier University of New Orleans are forever engrained on the walls of my soul. For the many conversations, phone calls, visits, and challenges to my thought, you have my

deepest gratitude. As one of at least 30 of your mentees, I thank you for inviting me into a family of people committed to the sacred dimensions of the intellectual life.

To the many teachers and mentors, near and far, especially Randall Bailey, Rosetta Ross, Stephen J. Duffy, James Bailey, Anna Floerke Scheid, Elisabeth Vasko, Elochukwu Uzukwu, Mark Gstholt, and Pastor S.V. Adolph, I owe you much more than I can put in words. Most responsible for this dissertation amongst my teachers is Gerald Boodoo, my guide and advisor, I thank you for pushing me to speak with a voice that matched the rhythms of the Delta peoples. But, more than this, I thank you for helping me to trust what only the activity of life can teach us about the God reality. With you I have learned that theology is always moving in the relations of life and never fixed within the confines of categories. These dedicated persons, amongst so many more, have inspired within men the courage to distrust what I thought were boundaries of my intellectual and academic abilities. With them I have found my voice and the discipline to sit my backside in a chair and put my hands to the keys.

Finally, I must thank the entity that springs me into life— day in and day out—my spouse, Jessica Hughes-Burnett. Your words, embrace, and wisdom have enlivened my heart and mind in many moments. Even while carrying the burdens of your own struggles in professional school, you have lent me your editing eyes. Line by line you have loved me through this task. This dance of the mind has brought us through many challenges of relocation and isolation, but through all of it you have not wavered. In your eyes, words, embrace, and presence I know that the Divine is real and that we are enough—mind, body, and soul.

Above all, and in all, that has been thanked and written I honor what cannot be expressed in the limitations of my imagination—the ineffable presence that my ancestors called out to from the pit of captivity. Thank you for hearing these murmurings, prayers, and memories. In your depths I have found breath, rhythm, life and courage—the courage to moan the blues.

That is why I will not restrain my tongue;
In my anguish of spirit I shall speak,
In my bitterness of soul I shall complain (Job 7:11)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	iv
DEDICATION	vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1	
Towards a Spatial Reading of the Blues and Revelation: Doing Theology in light of the Colonial Difference.....	18
Chapter 2	
Entanglements of Spatial Imagination in the Delta Region: Recovering a Blues Option for Decolonizing Revelation	76
Chapter 3	
The Blues Cosmivision and Decoloniality: Towards a Blues Perspective on Revelation and Knowledge.....	134
Chapter 4	
Revelation and Knowledge in the Delta: A Blues Take on the Modern/Colonial World and its Theological Foundations	197
Conclusion	269

Introduction

Decolonizing Revelation: A Spatial Reading of the Blues reads the cultural production of the blues in the United States, through the decolonial turn in the contemporary global fight against neo-liberal global market capitalism and its mechanization of epistemological hegemony. Further, insights from the decolonial turn will assist us in understanding how the blues became so ubiquitously associated with the demonic in the Afro-Christian Theological imagination and the U.S. imagination at large. We will treat the introductory elements of the blues below, but since the decolonial turn is so essential to the theoretical dimensions of this work, it is important to begin with this shift in the interpretation of domination. The decolonial turn marks a planetary recognition of the many non-European locations of struggle against settler colonialism and the duration of the colonial power dynamics that persist after the colony. Peruvian sociologist, Anibal Quijano, refers to the duration and transformation of colonial power into a world system of exploitation and domination as coloniality.¹ This struggle against coloniality, while intellectually charged, is not purely associated with the academy. Rather, it draws its meanings and its livelihood from grassroots commitments to dislocate or provincialize the political, religious, epistemological, and cosmological legacy of the European colonialists that endure despite the end of colonial occupation.² Amongst

¹ Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," in *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, ed. Mabel Moraña, Enrique D. Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 181.

² For an explanation of how decolonial intellectuals working in the academy think about their work in relationship to the everyday grassroots struggle with coloniality see: Juan Ricardo Aparicio & Mario Blaser, "The "Lettered City" and the Insurrection of Subjugated Knowledges in Latin America," *Anthropological Quarterly* 82, no. 1 (2008). See also: Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs* :

the committed are intellectuals that participate via theoretical support in the struggle for the recovery and regeneration of alternatives to the modern/colonial imagination. Decolonial theory, the term used to label the intellectual commitment, is understood here as a discursive project that joins grassroots commitments to the deconstruction of the discursive expressions of coloniality associated with European globalization.³ *Decolonizing Revelation* enters the decolonial discourse via the idea of space.

Space has a particular advantage because of the type of discursive responses that it evokes.⁴ Space is understood in this project as the envisioned material world

Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking, Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 66-67. Here, Mignolo sets out his version of decolonization based on the thought of Abdelhebir Khatibi, a Moroccan philosopher. Moving beyond the decolonization language Mignolo posits border thinking as an activity of decolonizing or dislocating the epistemological foundations of modernity. Alternatively, Mignolo contends that "border thinking" displaces the normativity enforced by the modern world system and its internal epistemologies. Decolonization then is spatially perceived as thinking that occurs from spaces where modernity and its foundations are *displaced* from subaltern local histories. By subaltern local histories we mean those histories that are subordinated and excluded by modern thinkers, especially those from the Eurocentric perspective. Mignolo contends that subaltern knowledges perform at the external border of modernity. For more on Mignolo's mapping of modernity, what he refers to as the modern/colonial world system: *ibid.*, 23-37.

³ Blaser, "The "Lettered City" and the Insurrection of Subjugated Knowledges in Latin America."

⁴ My articulation of space is one that speaks from various projects of decolonization around the planet. Space and the imagination of space during and after colonialism is always a contested especially as it relates to epistemology, politics, culture and economics. Decolonial projects that deal with space attempt to recover and in some cases create geography from the perspectives of those dominated by colonialism, modernity, patriarchy, sexism, heteronormativity, and racism amongst other ills. These projects recover and regenerate indigenous or repressed notions of space that are erased or made invisible by colonial and modern history. Central in decolonizing projects is a commitment to dislocating the modern/colonial imagination of space/time. This idea of dislocating the view of space enforced by colonialism and the project of modernity begins at the moment of contact between European settlers with non-European indigenous peoples across the planet. Decolonial notions of space within academic discourse emerge from critical thinkers that came of age mainly within the 20th century. These thinkers sought to make sense of their varied experiences of colonial domination and its intersections with gender, race, class, sex, sexuality and ethnicity. Inspired by many thinkers in the continental philosophical school of thought such as Deleuze, Foucault, and Derrida, decolonial thinkers worked alongside anti-colonial movements in order to dislocate Euro-centric forms of knowing space. As trained intellectuals in various fields, early decolonial thinkers, or as Nelson Maldonado Torres has named them post-continental thinkers, analyzed space and how space was considered from the "borders" of the conditions that *count* as modern. Stand out amongst the thinkers on space is Gloria Anzaldúa who in her text, *Borderlands/La*

that provides a location from which to organize a vision for life and living. Further, space prompts a recognition of opportunity and the precondition for the material achievements of human creativity. Within the modern/colonial world space is the primary opportunity on which much of the discursive imagination of European settler colonialism turns. Decolonial theory renames the encounter between the premodern indigenous perspectives on the spaces of the Americas and their encounter with the Occidental European perspective. Occidentalism, in this usage, refers to the image of the Americas as space in which to expand and play out a history of a new West.

Chapter one works to explicate the above encounter between European and indigenous perspectives. The reader may find that the indigenous perspective in chapter one is not as substantial as the critical analysis of Occidentalism. This deficit in treatment is intentional. Due to the social location of the writer, a U.S. southern black American male, the treatment of the indigenous experience requires a type of

Frontera: The New Mestiza articulates an imagination of space beyond the boundary of modern European conceptions space. Anzaldua also argues that Chicana spaces are spaces marked by imposition as well as self-organized creativity. Anzaldua produced a ground breaking insight that has influenced many non-European approaches to space, especially in formerly colonized zones. Several of the thinkers in this work are influenced by Anzaldua they include: Walter D. Mignolo, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Marta Lamas and Marcela Althaus-Reid. These thinkers move with and beyond Anzaldua's insights by recovering, constructing and analyzing notions of space/time that are unofficial, non-European, and often invisible within the historical record. In effect decolonial articulations of space dislocate the "official" or normative histories or genealogies of space that remain inscribed in the modern imagination and Eurocentrism. With these thinkers my project attempts to see the Delta Region through the Blues and the peoples that people that produced it. In doing so my aim is to situate the Delta Region as a "borderland" or a space that is non-modern, particularly as it relates to modern Afro-Christian religion. For Torres' thoughts on post-continentalism see: Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Epistemology, Ethics, and the Time/Space of Decolonization: Perspectives from the Caribbean and the Latina/O Americas," in *Decolonizing Epistemologies : Latina/O Theology and Philosophy*, ed. Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Eduardo Mendieta (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 199. For Anzaldua's notion of borderlands and space see: Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands : The New Mestiza = La Frontera*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Spinster/Aunt Lute, 1987).

restraint so as not to fall to the critique of appropriation. For this reason, the usage of Andean culture in chapter one should be read as a type of appreciation for the wisdom of the Andean world and its contribution to the struggles against the spatial occupation of their lands by the conquistadors and their replete Occidentalism. These points about Occidentalism withstanding, our treatment of space, has a particular focus in mind, or better, a particular space in mind—the Mississippi-Yazoo River Delta Region (hereafter as the Delta or Delta Region) of the southern United States. This space is particularly important because of the ways in which its pre-colonial inhabitants, the Mississippian Peoples, and the surrounding flora and fauna, hardwood forests, river valleys, swamps and flood plains were commodified and harnessed as capital for the production of modernity. Modernity, similar to Occidentalism, refers to the imagination of the Americas as the space of a new European future that is distinct from the late medieval period. Focused on the space of the Delta Region, chapter two works to dislocate the modern focus on the space as a resource commodity. This regionally based dislocation rearticulates the Mississippi Delta from the perspective of environmental history and the history of the Mississippian Peoples. In doing so, Chapter two distinguishes how the Delta Region (a space) was affected by Occidentalism and its varied activities of war, infectious disease transmission, clear cutting of the hardwood forests, fur hunting and the agricultural and maritime augmentations of the waterway systems of the Mississippi and Yazoo Rivers.⁵ These activities of the European imagination have a

⁵ Mikko Saikku, *This Delta, This Land : An Environmental History of the Yazoo-Mississippi Floodplain* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005), Ch. 4 and 5.

major effect on the space of the Delta Region and on the forced migration of the peoples that are the primary subjects of this text—the enslaved Africans who would come to be known as black Americans.

It is their particular experience as chattel, a labor commodity, in the makings of the modern world that situate the theological problem of revelation and its complicity within the dynamics of coloniality. This focus on the U.S. black American experience of coloniality builds upon the treatment of space to respond to the long standing crisis in black American theological hermeneutics. This crisis, as W.E.B. Du Bois articulated at the turn of the 20th Century, is a crisis of the “color line.” For Du Bois, “the color line” signified his substantially researched understanding of racial apartheid that persisted during and after the enslavement of African peoples in the Americas and the Caribbean.⁶ Du Bois saw racial apartheid as the primary threat to the sustainability of American Democracy.⁷ Against religious critiques of racial apartheid that framed it as a moral problem, Du Bois’ work produced a more radical interpretation of race that located it within the foundations of the modern world. His work prefigures what is articulated in this work as coloniality.⁸ The work of Du Bois is assumed and not reviewed in our articulation of coloniality. These points withstanding, the theological import to the crisis of race rests in the ways in which theology is integral to how the agents of European expansion employed theology as knowledge. Further, they employed theology, the theology of revelation in

⁶ Here I am particularly referring to W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870*, Harvard Historical Studies (New York, London etc.: Longmans, Green and Co., 1896).

⁷ W. E. B. Du Bois, *Writings, Library of America* (New York, N.Y.: The Library of America, 1986), 372.

⁸ The work of Du Bois is assumed and not reviewed in our articulation of coloniality.

particular, as an epistemic basis for articulating visions for the space of the Americas. Together, Chapters one and two will show that the space of the Delta Region is an epicenter for multiple conceptions and confrontations on race, revelation, knowledge, religion, ontology, and biology. The confrontations around these ideas are not binary, and often lead to entanglements that greatly challenge hermeneutical work. These entanglements situate the theological imagination of black Americans. The black American theological imagination, as shown with the works of E. Franklin Frazier, Albert J. Raboteau, and Joseph Washington, is customarily understood as formed within the confines of enslavement and then rearticulated after emancipation in the autonomous black American Protestant Churches.⁹ None of these historical occurrences happened in a vacuum. Rather, these occurrences are entangled with the problem of Occidentalism and its imposition on the space of the Delta Region. Both the enslaved and the emancipated articulate visions of the Delta Region as an option for their own visions of life. Christianity, as Albert Raboteau and Theophus Smith have argued, provided a type of grammar or language for the cosmovision—a discursive interpretation of the material and immaterial world—of black Americans.¹⁰ As a grammar, Christianity was employed as a system of assigning meaning—a grab bag of categories that were often filled in with meanings that defied the original meanings of their enslavers.

⁹ See: Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion : The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*, Updated ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).; Edward Franklin Frazier and C. Eric Lincoln, *The Negro Church in America* (New York,: Schocken Books, 1974); Edward Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1957); Joseph R. Washington, *Black Religion : The Negro and Christianity in the United States* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984).

¹⁰ Albert J. Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones : Reflections on African-American Religious History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 17; Theophus Harold Smith, *Conjuring Culture : Biblical Formations of Black America, Religion in America Series* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 73.

Theophus Smith gives a significant example of the difference in meaning when he reports that the enslaved and their direct descendants saw the bound Bible as a talisman that could effect change in the material world.¹¹ I recall my maternal grandparents, Lillie and Lavern Winters treating their Bible in similar ways. Nestled between the pages of the “House Bible” of my grandparents were wedding invitations, family photos, letters, and all types of representations of loved ones and petitions to God. My grandparents saw this act as one of hiding their family and their worries in the words of God. It was thought to give us protection from the principalities of evil at work in the world. At this very moment, my wedding invitation rests with the keeper of the House Bible, my eldest uncle. With this autobiographical reference in mind, the reader should be informed that along with the new grammar of Christianity, there were disparate meanings of the African Worlds, which also played a part in the new configuration of the religious outlook commonly designated by religious studies scholars as black religion.¹² Theologically speaking, the experience of being enslaved, emancipated, and then relegated to second class citizenry through Jim and Jane Crow became a central concern for all those black Americans who proclaimed Jesus as their savior and the Son of God. Whether under the religious formation of Christian missionaries, or from their own

¹¹ Smith, *Conjuring Culture : Biblical Formations of Black America*, 6.

¹² Ibid., 32. Here Theophus Smith makes this point into the religious studies work of Zora Neale Hurston and here articulation of how Black Americans used the Bible to “make over their world.” Hurston’s work was instrumental in setting out a new framework for understanding Black American religious and cultural life. Nevertheless, scholars of black religion are still learning from her insights. For Zora Neale Hurston’s insights see: Zora Neale Hurston, *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, 1st. ed. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1939), 183-84. For more on the history of the study of black religion see: Charles H. Long, *Significations : Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 145-68; 87-97. See also: Washington, *Black Religion : The Negro and Christianity in the United States*.

gaze on the Christian practices of their enslavers, black Americans were always active conscientious interpreters and confessors of faith.

The main question that arises, which is introduced in Chapter one and substantially engaged in Chapter four, is how do the cultural underpinnings of black American life, in our case the blues, dislocate the European reception of the Judeo-Christian and the Graeco-Roman worlds. Robert Hood and William R. Jones help to extricate this dislocation in theological terms. In general, these two theological critics ask whether or not the cultural sensibilities of Europe, in which the Christian message is received, are essential to the profession of Christian faith. Hood asks if Eurocentric, Graeco-Roman and Judeo-Christian epistemologies, that have histories of anti-black cultural and political hegemony, are essential or non-essential to the revelation of God.¹³ William R. Jones, with his focus on theodicy, asks another fairly radical question, “Is God a White Racist?” In other words, is one's confession of the revelation of God a simultaneous acceptance of the conditions of racism?¹⁴ That racism exists, is in Jones' eyes, a circumstance that could only be justifiable if God is on the side of White domination. As such, Jones calls for a doctrine of God that does not signify the sufferings from anti-black oppression as theologically justified by redemptive suffering. With and beyond these thinkers, it will be shown that however much they raise radical questions about Eurocentric discourse, neither of them quite get into the deep historical centers of the modern/colonial world and its

¹³ Robert E. Hood, *Must God Remain Greek? : Afro Cultures and God-Talk* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), xxv-xxvi.

¹⁴ William R. Jones, *Is God a White Racist? : A Preamble to Black Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), Chapter 1.

pernicious Occidentalism. This point affirms the advantage of the focus on space. Our task, with decolonial theory in hand, is to fill out this lacuna by providing a spatial reading of the blues.

Blues, as a counterstatement of the adoption of Christianity by black Americans, offers us a particular entry point to the theological crisis that is homegrown right in the heart of the Delta at the turn of the 20th century. In the blues there is a significant challenge to the Afro-Christian vision of the Delta Region as a space for building black Christian institutions. These Christian institutions, among other things, have worked to leverage capitulations to the modern values of patriarchy, piety, Victorian womanhood, temperance, sobriety, and work ethic as a means of legitimating black Americans as fully civilized subjects who were fit for participation in the Democratic Union. Chapter three clarifies the epistemological forces working in the blues that actively resist the Afro-Christian imagination, as well as those forces that we discussed as Occidentalism and coloniality.

Occidentalism and coloniality would find within the religious imagination of Afro-Christianity a lively host for the replication of its viral like domination of human life.

Chapter three works to excavate the history of the blues epistemology and the ways in which it emerged from the Christianization and racialization of black American culture. The tools of decolonial thought, history of religions, and critical geography will help to show that Afro-Christianity repressed the blues in ways similar to how racialization and anthropological signification suppressed African and indigenous cultures of the Americas. In effect, Western Christendom as a mechanism of colonization, worked to impose a spatial imagination of the globe

which divided it into zones of true religion, false religion and non-religion. Chapter one introduces this cartography through a discussion of Emmanuel Eze's critique of Immanuel Kant's *Geography*.¹⁵ In particular, Eze distinguishes the ethno-religious Eurocentrism that was envisioned cartographically in the T and O map—a map that mimics the zones of religious belonging (above).

Chapter four picks back up the discussion of Occidentalism from the blues perspective set out in chapter three. The blues cosmivision will be put to use in further dislocating Occidentalism as it is communicated via the theological idea of revelation. Chapter four will show that the blues as an epistemology resists racialization of religious difference. Drawing on insights from Joseph Washington's critical reading of Afro-Christianity and the decolonial readings of the rise of the racialization of religious difference in the modern world, it is shown that revelation was abused to justify enslavement and other exploitative actions that worked by connecting skin color to a hierarchical chain of evolutionary religious being. Darker skin color, which will be shown via Sylvia Wynter and Nelson Maldonado-Torres, was used as an empty marker that could be filled in with disparaging theological, biological, anthropological, and ontological claims about non-Europeans. With regards to revelation, what is significant is the shift from the theological assessment of difference to the ontological or anthropological assessment of difference within the imposed Eurocentric evolutionary perspective. Within Eurocentrism,

¹⁵ Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, "The Color of Reason: The Idea of Race in Kant's Anthropology," in *Postcolonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (Cambridge, Mass. ; Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 103-40. See also: Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options, Latin America Otherwise: Languages, Empires, Nations* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 181-209.

“whiteness” and lighter skin color were signified as the highest evolutionary achievement of religion, culture, and epistemology. This shift from theological knowledge (revelation) to rational knowledge or reason is particularly decisive because of the ways it diversified the epistemological justifications for the domination of black Americans and other groups subjugated under the coloniality of power. Blues people, and their cosmovision undergo this subjugation at both inter-racial and intra-racial levels. Blues people¹⁶ are considered here as a people that think and approach the Delta Region from a distinguishable epistemic difference that is identified with the cultural production of blues music. As a people that approach the Delta region from a self-determined epistemology, blues people emerge as a distinct grouping amongst black American peoples living within the Delta Region of Mississippi at the turn of the 20th century. While the blues epistemic is distinguishable it should not be understood as fixed or essential identity. Rather, blues people refers to those who engage in activities that reflect a distinguishable epistemic difference from other epistemic perspectives amongst black Americans.

With the previous mapping of the Delta Region and blues people in mind, the goal of Chapter four is to affirm the emergence of the blues as moment in U.S. history that visibly dislocates the inheritance of Occidentalism and coloniality in the

¹⁶ For a more detailed treatment of my reading of blues people see my discussion on pg. 41 In general my use of the term follows blues historians who use it to distinguish those black Americans that create and organize themselves around the blues aesthetic, epistemology, music and dance. See: Clyde Adrian Woods, *Development Arrested : The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta, The Haymarket Series* (London: Verso, 1998), 16-17. Woods highlights an account of blues performer Shelby Brown who referred to people from the Mississippi Plantations as “blues people” as a result of the hard living of chopping and picking cotton. However, the term “blues people” is used by many historians to name black Americans that are integral to blues culture. See also: Imamu Amiri Baraka, *Blues People : Negro Music in White America*, 1st Quill ed. (New York: William Morrow, 1999), x-xi.

Afro-Christian imagination. Revelation within these dynamics begs decolonization because of its collusion with the spatial arrangements that are racialized to represent varying degrees of anti-humanity. The reader might find such an assessment redundant in the face of all of the deconstruction, jettisoning, and debunking of transcendentalism in the European genealogies of thought.¹⁷ While this concern has its merits, this work does not take up this concern, because it is precisely this Eurocentric concern that leaves the hegemony of the Eurocentric perspective intact as the primary lens for reading history, albeit critically. As stated before, our task is to dislocate and provincialize European epistemic discourse. While such a task can never be pure or complete, it remains as a viable option for rethinking the theology of revelation from the perspective of the dominated. As such, the blues perspective on the space of the Delta Region will be the space from which our reflections on the coloniality of revelation speak.

To close, I add that the reader should be warned about some of the glaring limitations of this work. First among them is a lack of treatment of music theory. The reader looking for a serious ethnomusicological investigation will find many things wanting in this text. This limitation notwithstanding, wherever the work treats the blues as music, the author has chosen interlocutors from existing

¹⁷ While there are many European thinkers that disrupt or attempt to move beyond transcendentalist knowledge these thinkers are not thinking from subaltern or even oppressed perspectives. For this reason I do not review the Enlightenment, Continental Philosophy, or European modern theologians. For a treatment of the problem with transcendentalism and revelation in modern theology see: Andrew Shanks, *God and Modernity : A New and Better Way to Do Theology* (London: Routledge, 2000). Also see: J. Kameron Carter, "An Unlikely Convergence: W. E. B. Du Bois, Karl Barth, and the Problem of the Imperial God-Man," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 11, no. 3 (Winter 2012). In this article Carter makes a case for the construction of Imperialism in the modern theological imagination. His work examples the kind of perspective that looks to disrupt the Eurocentric perspective on transcendentalism.

ethnomusicological scholarship. From these sources it is clear that most of the blues music that emerged from the Delta Region had a communal purpose and was performed by local artists as an activity that had many functions, with the transmission of knowledge and aesthetic creativity for the purpose of communal consumption being among the highest functions.¹⁸ With this in mind, the quoted blues lyrics should be envisioned as performances rather than abstracted written poetry. This withstanding, I have reserved my critical comments on blues music for those moments that are germane to the topics of revelation, knowledge, and their spatial affects. Second, the blues perspective is distinguished throughout this work as a cosmovision or as an epistemology. Cosmovision refers to the view of material and immaterial reality, and epistemology refers to the knowledge projected by blues people. This grouping is more analytical than it is ontological. "Blues people," distinguish all those in the Delta Region who participated in and were influenced by the cultural production of the blues. In some instances, blues people blurred the lines of identity between the church and the blues imagination. In this way, "blues

¹⁸ Paul Garon, *The Devil's Son-in-Law: The Story of Peetie Wheatstraw and His Songs*, Blues Paperback (London: Studio Vista, 1971); Alan Lomax, *The Land Where the Blues Began*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993); Jon Michael Spencer, *Blues and Evil* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993); Julio Finn, *The Bluesman : The Musical Heritage of Black Men and Women in the Americas*, 1st American ed. (New York: Interlink Books, 1992); Albert Murray, *Stomping the Blues*, First Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1982); Gerhard Kubik, *Africa and the Blues* (Jackson Miss.: University Press of Mississippi, 1999); Paul Oliver, *Blues Fell This Morning : Meaning in the Blues*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Amiri Baraka, *Blues People : Negro Music in White America* (New York: Perennial, 2002); Daphne Duval Harrison, *Black Pearls : Blues Queens of the 1920s* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1988); Paul Garon, *Blues and the Poetic Spirit*, Rev. and expanded ed. (San Francisco: City Lights, 1996); Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism : Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998); David Evans, "Bessie Smith's 'Back-Water Blues': The Story Behind the Song," *Popular Music* 26, no. 1 (2007).

people” names a sensibility that is a part of a person and not a fundamental definition of an individuated human.

Lastly, another limitation is the historical scope of the work as it pertains to the emergence of the blues during 1865-1930. This limit in historical scope is not meant to suggest that the blues is as a type of cultural museum. Further, it is not intended to recover a dead cultural artifact. The assumption is, instead, that the blues is alive but repressed and underappreciated. The blues sensibility is trans-local, meaning that it exists both locally and beyond its confines. As a perspective, the blues has been carried along in many relocations of Black Americans that left the Delta in hope of better lives in northern U.S. cities. The blues is also trans-local in that it is in conversation with the different transitions in the blues perspective that follows the Great Migration. Through the medium of sound recording technology, the juke box, the radio and the music industry, the blues travels in and out of the Mississippi Delta Region, sometimes changing and sometimes remaining the same. The blues is also alive because of the long standing dynamics of the plantation culture that persist to this day. Multinational corporations such as Uncle Bens, Fruit of the Loom, Delta Pride Catfish, and others continue to exploit the available resource of cheap labor resultant from the extreme rates of unemployment and lack of complex systems of economic sustainability within the contemporary Delta Region.¹⁹ The conditions in the Delta Region of today have not changed. It is still a

¹⁹ Emilie Townes makes a similar argument to my own concerning the problems of land ownership for women and the formerly enslaved who were granted small portions of land under as an act of war. This act was named Special Field Order 15. This is the act that many in the contemporary world associate with reparations. The colloquial representation of federally mandated reparations for slavery, “40 acres and a mule.” The lands were mainly those of Confederate owned rice plantations that were confiscated during the Civil War. These lands covered portions of the coastal regions and

land run by the plantation and its bosses. With this in mind, the reader should see this as a starting point for reflection rather than a eulogistic exposition of a cultural artifact.

Explanation of Terms

There are some moments where I use cosmovision, perspective, outlook and life-way interchangeably. Cosmovision is understood here as a people view of the material, immaterial and spiritual makeup of their life world. The term has its beginnings in Latina/o/x anthropologies specifically aimed in recovering and regenerating indigenous forms of relating to the land, thought, and faith.

Cosmovision is not to be confused with epistemology which refers to knowledge and the substantiation of knowledge within a given cosmovision. When distinctions between these terms are necessary, I urge the reader to the respective meanings of these terms. Also of mention is the term colonial difference. The “colonial

small islands along the coasts of Northern Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina. Townes’ work contextualizes special Field Order 15 by reading it in tandem with several literary motifs of memory, history, imagination and image. In particular she draws these motifs from Martiniquean literary writer Patrick Chamoiseau and his novel, *Texaco*. Through literature and its image of history Townes constructs a counter narrative to the reparation efforts of Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Jackson, and the Freedman’s Bureau. Through a rigorous treatment of the literary motifs that remember history from the perspective of the enslaved and formerly enslaved Townes contends that reparations must be remembered for its “almostness” and its inability to bridge the gap between democracy and what she describes as American Empire and turbo capitalism. Further Townes contends that the roots of Empire and its now decentralized forms of capital acquisition along with efforts to provide options for disenfranchised minorities are less ethical than they are attempts to substantiate a longstanding desire for Christian Triumphalism. My work shares these concerns with Townes, but approaches them from the perspective of coloniality and the process of decoloniality. Townes’ focus on reparations and reinterpreting it from the perspective of empire is similar to my move to interpret land and the blues in relationship to coloniality. Where Townes reads reparations through literature and the political economics of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, I read the land through the lens of the blues and the decolonial thought of Sylvia Wynter, Walter D. Mignolo, and Anibal Quijano. For more on Townes see: Emilie Maureen Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil, Black Religion, Womanist Thought, Social Justice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), Ch. 5.

difference,”²⁰ coined by Walter Mignolo, is used to refer to the variable forms of assigning difference in the modern/colonial world. There are two systemically interrelated perspectives from which to view the colonial difference: from perspectives of those inside the modern project, which usually aligns with European epistemologies, and from perspectives of the subaltern, those subjugated by the modern project and its respective epistemologies. While the first chapter spends considerable time explaining this term, the reader should note that the subject of the sentence is key in determining which perspective of the colonial difference is being highlighted. All other terms follow a standard form of usage and are defined along the way.

With all the above in mind, this project affirms that the blues is a U.S. born cosmivision that provides an alternative to the reception of the colonial imagination in the Christian Theology of revelation and how it operates as knowledge amongst those black American Protestants living in the Delta Region. The tension between the wisdom of the blues and Afro-Christianity has far reaching implications not only for discussions concerning decoloniality, but for those theological inquiries into the meaning of race. As such, this work recovers the blues as an undertreated

²⁰ Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs : Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, 3,12. In Mignolo’s thought colonial difference refers to the ways in which Europeans; missionaries, conquistadors, and colonialists, differentiated anthropological differences between themselves and the indigenous peoples of the Americas. “Colonial difference,” names the differencing mechanisms of Europe that are used to organize the former colonial outposts of Spain, England, France, and Deutschland, Germany, and the United States. The term also names the ways in which Europe is blind to how its differencing projects, particularly in anthropology, effects the peoples who are subjugated by it. The colonial difference also names a perspective for experiencing the modern world. This a perspective mainly recognizable by those who are the sources for the production of modernity and not the recipients of its so called progress. As an analytical category the colonial difference names the varied experiences of the colonized and their post-colonial descendants.

perspective in U.S. theologies inspired by the task of participating in God's historical activity of transformation.

Chapter 1

Towards a Spatial Reading of the Blues and Revelation: Doing Theology in light of the Colonial Difference

Introduction

Modernity is simultaneously an expression of coloniality. Coloniality is understood here as a threefold process of the racialization of human identities, the commodification of the land, and the decentralization of indigenous epistemologies and cosmologies. This process emerges from the European world and the voyages of the 15th century that lead to settler colonialism in the Americas, Africa, the Caribbean, and Asia.²¹ Western Christianity, especially in the efforts of its patrons to “Christianize the globe,” has had a questionable relationship with modernity and has often provided it with ideological foundations that have worked to ensure projects of colonization.²² One crucial ideological foundation was the Christian idea of “revealed” knowledge. Revealed knowledge was understood as the knowledge revealed from the Word of God as conceived in the Hebrew Bible, the Gospels, the Incarnation, and the history of theological thought (doctrine) that arises in the Mediterranean and Graeco-Roman worlds.²³

Against the backdrop of colonial expansion, revealed knowledge undergoes both internal and external critique. Internal critiques include the debates over heresy, the Reformation, Enlightenment, modern science, and the rise of the secular.

²¹ Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," in *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, 181-88.

²² Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs : Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, 21-24; 251.

²³ *Ibid.*, 12.

At the borders of these debates are the external critiques that depart from other ways of knowing from African, Indigenous American, Amerindian and Asian cultures.²⁴ When Western Christianity came into contact with these foreign ways of knowing, it privileged its ideology (theology) as the final judge of the significance or insignificance of alternative epistemologies. Conversely, many who exist on the epistemological borders of modernity adopted Christian knowledge. This adoption signifies a trans-epistemological (“trans-” marks the holding together of differences without resolution) reception between European and non-European knowledge. Revelation, then, in the modern/colonial world exists amid the epistemological exchanges and political relationships entangled in the colonial processes mentioned above.

The overarching question taken up in this dissertation is how non-Eurocentric ways of knowing are theologically significant and, as such, provide adequate foundations on which to re-imagine God’s self-disclosure in the world. This question significantly shapes the insight gained from the discipline of decolonial thought. Decolonial thought departs from the histories and “forced contexts” of colonized and formerly colonized people.²⁵ For these groups, modernity is seen through the struggles to deconstruct and re-imagine the three ideas on

²⁴ Ibid., 30-33.

²⁵ For more on this see: Gerald Boodoo, *Understanding Church and Theology in the Caribbean Today, Many Faces one Church*. Here, Boodoo discusses the notion of “the forced context” or the coerced situation in which the peoples and, therefore, the churches of the Caribbean find themselves. The “forced context” is resultant from the many forms of domination that extend from colonization through post-colonialism. These forms of dominance over-determine the life of the Church and Theology in the Caribbean in ways that demand a new option. This is not an effort at novelty or originality, but about responding to the peoples of the Caribbean. Boodoo’s concept of the “forced context” and the need for a Caribbean option for the church prefigures what I will argue below as a blues option against coloniality in the context of the Delta Region.

which coloniality operates: human identity, the land, and knowledge.²⁶ In the discipline of theology, several fields have emerged as a response to coloniality. Although thinkers within these fields might not be self-described as decolonial, they include, but are not excluded to, Latin American Liberation Theology, Black Theology, Feminist Theology, Womanist Theology, Queer Theology Native

²⁶What I am arguing here as decolonial thought is inclusive of thinkers that distinguish their perspective from post-colonialism, world systems theory, post-modernity, post-structuralism, and the continental philosophy. The point in decolonial thought is not to deconstruct the theories above but to recognize the boundaries and limits of these theories especially as they reflect questionable proximity to Eurocentrism and its colonial legacy. It is still a much contested debate as to whether or not decolonial thought is distinguishable from post-colonialism. However, my suggestion following the thought of Sylvia Wynter, Walter D. Mignolo, and Anibal Quijano suggests that there is a recognizable difference between post-colonial projects and the decolonial projects. One recognizable difference is the idea of coloniality. Thinkers associated with the emergence of post-colonialism such as Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, and Dipesh Chakrabarty are seen as dialogue partners in decolonial thought but are seen as distinct from the activities that attempt to dislocate what Quijano articulates as the coloniality of power. Moving with and beyond the post-colonial attention to anti-colonialism and post-colonial revolution the theory of coloniality contends that post-colonial political organization is still entrenched within the legacy of colonialism that has globalized itself beyond the colonies and their respective metropolises. As such, decoloniality looks to provide options for thinking and living that delink from the now global epistemologies of Europe that remain present in the spaces of former colonies via neo-liberal global market capitalism and its decentralized trans-national modes of occupying space, acquiring labor and enforcing Eurocentric epistemologies. In addition to this difference, decoloniality is distinct from post-colonialism because of its location within Latin American and Caribbean perspectives. From these geographies decolonial thought confronts the problem of Occidentalism and the imposition of Eurocentrism on the indigenous forms of knowledge that predate colonial expansion into the Americas. As Mignolo argues the activities of colonialism in Latin America are distinguishable from those within India and the Middle East which were the primary focus of Spivak, Said and Chakrabarty in particular. Of the post-colonial thinkers mentioned above Decolonial thought is particularly indebted to Fanon's idea of inventive humanism, the subaltern from Spivak and provincialization from Chakrabarty. For more on the reception of post-colonial thought in decolonial theory see: Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs : Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, 97-115. For foundational post-colonial thought see: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds : Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Methuen, 1987). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Rosalind C. Morris, *Can the Subaltern Speak? : Reflections on the History of an Idea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988); Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1965); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967); Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* (London: Writers and Readers, 1980); Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for 'Indian' Pasts?," *Representations* 37 (1992). For U.S. indigenous perspectives on this see: A. Smith, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (Duke University Press, 2015); George E. Tinker, *Missionary Conquest : The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

American, Queer, Asian and Asian American Theologies of Liberation. These theologies have mainly dealt with the realities of oppression and the various implications of coloniality for the different human groups that experience it. What is often left unaddressed or insufficiently addressed are the knowledges of these groups and their ways of knowing the self-disclosure of the Divine. This dissertation focuses attention on one of these ways of knowing that has its origins in the southeastern part of the U.S.—*the blues*.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will introduce the blues as a decolonial way of knowing that mediates the Divine self-disclosure in and through the sensual, the land, and the sonic. To this end, I will make three distinct moves that will be organized into three sections. In the first section, I will set out a decolonial way of thinking through the phenomena of modernity and its constitutive underside of coloniality. Significant in this section will be the theoretical work of cultural theorist, Walter D. Mignolo. The second section provides a way of understanding the blues and blues music as a counterstatement to the colonial imaginations of identity, land, the human, and knowledge. Significant in this section is the work of blues commentators, Clyde Woods, Angela Davis, and Albert Murray. The third section provides a way of situating the phenomena of the blues as a decolonial theological option that counters the moves in Black Theologies of Liberation to reconceive racial identity or “black experience” as an alternative ground on which God’s self-disclosure can be mediated. To accomplish this task, the third section engages in a dialogue with the works of Robert H. Hood and William R. Jones, who example the differences between doing theology from the difference of racial identity and doing

theology from the difference of post-colonial/decolonial culture. Lastly, I provide a concluding reflection that affirms the need for liberation theology at-large and black theology in particular to delink from colonial logics; in this case, the logic of racialization as a foundation for understanding God's self-disclosure.

Introducing the Theoretical Frame: Coloniality and Occidentalism

Since the advent of Christendom, the West (or the Occident) has been a component of the Christian imagination. Cultural Studies scholar, Walter Mignolo, has dedicated a lot of his studies to charting the emergence of how Christian concepts of salvation and mission imagined the Americas as the Occidental location of the *Orbis Universalis Christianus*.²⁷ Mignolo's theory of the west in Christendom and secular reason work in conversation with one another to produce two forms of what he termed Occidentalism. Occidentalism refers to the re-configuration of the Americas, as a new locus of enunciating power, economics, salvation, mission, state, culture and knowledge. The historical marker for the emergence of the Americas as the conquest of Europe, amongst decolonial thinkers like Mignolo, is commonly associated with the late 15th Century and the voyages that lead to the colonial outposts in the Americas. Regarding the production of knowledge, these outposts became the loci for enunciating the experience of contact with the spaces and peoples of the Americas and Africa. Modern area studies such as anthropology, sociology, and religion share this historical starting point within the westernization

²⁷ Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs : Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 17, 280-85.

of European thought, on one hand, and the westernization of the Americas on the other.

Decolonial thought has as its basis, following the insights of Anibal Quijano, a critical understanding of the discursive practices based on the imagination of modernity as a universal global future. Some of these discursive practices include the commodification of human beings and the natural world, the racialization of ethnic differences, and the hyper-sexualization of the non-European. Together, these discursive practices constitute what Quijano refers to as the modern/colonial world system and the coloniality of power²⁸. The former refers to the imaginary that situated Christianity and secularism as the future for the “primitive” religions of the world, and the latter refers to the managerial practices that employ the imaginary. From this perspective, modernity is the story of European peoples taking the Americas as their home and then enforcing this narrative, with all its preconceived notions of hierarchy, epistemology, and religion, as the future for humanity at-large. Decolonial thought focuses its intellectual projects on borders of modernity where the subaltern peoples experience the weight of the coloniality of power. As many critical historians have shown, the contact between European peoples and the indigenous peoples of Africa and the Americas required a revision of how European and indigenous peoples understood themselves in the world. “Contact,” to borrow the terminology of Charles Long, signifies the historical moment of the interaction of

²⁸ See: Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," in *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, 181-84. See also: Anibal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein, "Americanness as a Concept, or the Americas in the Modern World-System," *International Social Science Journal* 44, no. 134 (1992).

the European/colonial imagination with the already existing pre-colonial imaginations of the Americas and Africa.²⁹ Moreover, contact signifies the long duration of this interaction and the processes of making sense out of the reality of the forced context of modernity/coloniality.

Christianity has had an ambiguous relationship with the aforementioned Occidentalism. On one hand, Christian faith attempts to critique the colonial imagination or the coloniality of power from within privileged locations of power. Las Casas and the Abolitionist movements in North America are examples of this. On the other hand, the indigenous peoples who are faced with the coloniality of power have often reimagined Christianity from the borders of the modern project. Decolonial theorists have been focused on teasing out these subaltern interpretations of Christianity and Western secularism and the locales from which these interpretations speak. As Walter Mignolo denotes in his text, *Local Histories Global Designs*, the advent of disciplinary studies in the Western Academy, especially in the fields of anthropology and sociology, saw the local histories of indigenous peoples as objects of study rather than loci of enunciation.³⁰ This reinforces the

²⁹ Charles H. Long, *Significations : Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion*, Series in Philosophical and Cultural Studies in Religion (Aurora, Colo.: Davies Group, 1999), 108-23.

³⁰ Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs : Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, Chapter 4. Here, Mignolo situates his critique of disciplined based studies (also trans-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary methods) within the writings of other critiques of the global hegemony of European based theory and reason. In particular, his focus is on the writings of the South Asian Subaltern Studies Group and their adaptation in the writings of The Latin American Subaltern Studies Group. Mignolo calls for a move “from the culture of scholarship,” in which the socio-economic structures of subordination and domination are part and parcel. Instead, Mignolo posits that thinking should be understood *pluriversally* as a response to material and local needs. His emphasis on the “colonial difference” is an attempt to make visible the languages of thought and the epistemologies that operate on the “darker side of modernity,” the side that experiences the subordination and domination that is the product of European modernity. The scholarly concepts such as canon, discipline, and fields of study, in Mignolo’s analysis, should all be grounded in their respective local histories and not seen as universally translatable to all human groups. For more on the problem of

Occidental imagination of America as the civilized context (albeit forced) which provided the “only” rational ends for the primitive cultures of the modern colonial world: Christian Salvation or secularism. Christianity, from the side of modernity, has as its crises the moral dilemma of the "other." In the academic pursuit of theology, this crisis has been confronted by revising how cultural difference is conceived in relation to salvation.³¹ In this predicament, the bodies, knowledges and religions of indigenous peoples in the Americas and Africa have been conceived by some as the expression of God's soteriological power in history, and by others as the opposition to salvation history. From the perspective of modernity, the local histories, epistemologies, and religions of indigenous peoples have become increasingly visible, which raises the question of the theological significance of non-

theory, reason and Eurocentrism see: Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for 'Indian' Pasts?," *Representations* 37(1992): 1-26. Fernando Coronil, "Transculturation and the Politics of Theory: Countering the Center, Cuban Counterpoint," in *Introduction to Cuban Counterpoint*, ed. Fernando Ortiz (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); Édouard Glissant and J. Michael Dash, *Caribbean Discourse : Selected Essays*, Caraf Books (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989); Enrique D. Dussel, "Transmodernity and Interculturality: An Interpretation from the Perspective of Philosophy of Liberation," *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1, no. 3 (2012).

³¹ By this I am referring to those theologies within the modern period that recognize the difference of the religious other. These theologies realize the challenge that cultural difference presents to mission and the understanding of salvation. However, these theologies are not yet addressing the epistemological difference of the subaltern in the way being called for in de-colonial theory. For more on this topic see: Robert J. Schreiter, *Reconciliation : Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order*, The Boston Theological Institute Series (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1992); Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity : Theology between the Global and the Local*, Faith and Cultures Series (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997); Paul F. Knitter, *One Earth, Many Religions : Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995); John Hick and Paul F. Knitter, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness : Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, Faith Meets Faith (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987); John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion : Human Responses to the Transcendent* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1989); Karl Rahner, "Anonymous Christians," *Theological Investigations* 6 (1969): 390-98; Jeannine Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly on Salvation? : A Feminist Approach to Religious Pluralism* (New York: Continuum, 2005); Kwok Pui-lan, *Globalization, Gender, and Peacebuilding : The Future of Interfaith Dialogue*, The Madeleva Lecture in Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 2012); Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

European knowledges. Ecumenical and inter-religious studies, especially within the contexts of oppression, have wrestled with this question from the perspectives of culture, gender, human rights, and poverty. Nevertheless, the question of how these theological insights have provided a decolonial foundation of departure is still left unanswered. It is to one of these theologies that we now turn.

The Visibility of the Subaltern as a Challenge to the Christian Imagination

Catholic liberation theologian, Gustavo Gutiérrez, was one of the first theologians to give theological significance to the emergent visibility of “subalternized” peoples. He described the visibility of the subaltern peoples of modernity as the “irruption of the poor into history.”³² Gutiérrez’s work made use of the social sciences (Marxist Analysis and Development Theory) to situate the indigenous peoples of the Americas as the laborers and objects of the modern world. The “irruption of the poor” for Gutiérrez, required a new understanding of Christian salvation which responded to the urgent need for the liberation of the poor and those oppressed by the modern project. Gutiérrez’s insight recognizes that the scandal of modern poverty in Latin America is *a* condition from which theologians can interpret the scandal of the cross in the biblical text. Moreover, the poor of history have theological significance in so far as they embody the experience of suffering which salvation history is designed to end. The new project for modern Christian history in Gutiérrez’s estimation is the liberation of the poor rather than the confessional conversion of humanity propagated by the first Christendom.

³² Gustavo Gutiérrez, Caridad Inchausti, and John Eagleson, *A Theology of Liberation : History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988), xx.

Some critics of Gutierrez have argued that his project of liberation reduced the subaltern subject as peoples defined mainly through their experience of economic poverty rather than their culture (spiritualities, epistemologies, bodies, etc.)³³ In this configuration, the anthropological predicament of entrenchment in the "world of poverty" is privileged as the *sitz im leben*. From a de-colonial perspective, thinkers like Mignolo have argued that Gutierrez's project presents yet another imagination of salvation history which posits its brand of Occidentalism via the universal project of liberation conceived in fairly Eurocentric terms.³⁴ Particularly significant, for our purposes, is the unexamined recapitulation of Occidentalist interpretations of time (eschatology) and space (the Christian imagination of the world) that informs the liberation theology of Gutierrez and others.³⁵ From a theological perspective, this dissertation contends that while poverty was a much needed foundation to consider, the focus on poverty often has resulted in covering over the importance of non-Western conceptions of time and space operative in diverse communal lifeways of those summarily classified as "the poor." For this reason, this dissertation

³³ Gutierrez's notion of the "irruption of the poor" and his formulation of "critical reflection on historical praxis" are critiqued from multiple angles. For a critique on Gutierrez's use of secular notions of poverty and liberation as theological content see: John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, Signposts in Theology (Oxford, UK: B. Blackwell, 1990). For a critique of the heteronormative or un-embodied notion of poverty see: Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996); Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Eduardo Mendieta, *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/O Theology and Philosophy*, 1st ed., Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquia (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012); Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000). For economic and critical law based critiques of Gutierrez's notion of poverty see: Ivan Petrella, *The Future of Liberation Theology: An Argument and Manifesto* (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2004). For a critique of Gutierrez's "western" conceptualization of poverty see: Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, Latin America Otherwise: Languages, Empires, Nations (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

³⁴ Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, 72.

³⁵ For more on the problem of the Christian notions of time and space as it relates to the making of the Western World see: Vine Deloria, *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion*, 3rd ed. (Golden, Colo.: Fulcrum Pub., 2003), 114-33.

foregrounds, as central to decolonizing theological projects, the imagination of space, and the way local, non-Western spatial imaginations might contribute new or alternative mediations of revelation and liberation.

The Indigenous Spatial: Basis for a Decolonial Theological Turn

The planet, its continents, and the bodies of water that surround them, situate the organisms of the earth in space. Space, then, is understood here as the natural geographical situation in which persons and peoples find themselves.³⁶ However, natural geography does not have the last word. In addition to the natural geographical situatedness, there is also the meaning that humans give space. As articulated above, in the colonial imagination, the “space” of the Americas is seen as a space in which Europe envisions a future for the Western world. However, decolonial projects situated amongst the indigenous peoples of the Americas and elsewhere have also enunciated their understanding of space on their terms. One example of this comes from the ways in which Andean cultures made sense of the

³⁶ What I am doing with the blues is similar to what Maria Lugones and Marcella Althaus Reid have done in their articulation and location of decolonial thought in *spaces* that allow for the transgression of the “interlocking oppressions” and the violence of being labeled “indecent.” Space for these thinkers is discursively reworked from the perspective of those deemed unfit as epistemological contributors to geographic, political, sexual and embodied meanings of space. My treatment finds particular synergy with Marcella Althaus Reid’s idea of the “indecent” and the *spaces* they live in and reimagine. I engage Althaus Reid’s idea of the indecent and its legacy in the interpretation of biblical forms of revelation in Chapter 4. I find Althaus-Reid’s work on the politics of indecency and how indecency is used to write off entire spatial experiences of other worlds to be an important way of naming the fundamental activity that is operative in the repression of the blues. Also similar to Althaus-Reid, is my reading of the Delta Region as a blues space that dislocates Afro-Christian ideology and its adoption of the European imaginations of race, gender, sexuality and class. This attention to the dislocation of Europe finds many similarities with Althaus-Reid’s idea of “queering” oppressive normative categories of Christian Theology and European ideology at large. Were reads looks to reclaim those reimaged queer spaces, I look to assert blues spaces. For more on the insights of these two thinkers see: Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology : Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000).

³⁶ Alejandro Ortiz Rescaniere, “El Mito De La Escuela,.” in *Ideología Mesiánica Del Mundo Andino: Antología De Juan M. Ossio A*, ed. Juan M. Ossio A (Lima: I. Prado Pastor, 1973).

imposition of writing and literacy, the symbolic systems of the colonial imagination, and how these systems of conveying meaning suggested implications for the future of their spatial imagination of the lands they inhabited. In the text, *Ideología Mesidnica del Mundo Andino* (Messianic Ideology of the Andean World), Alejandro Ortiz Rescaniere writes an article entitled, "El mito de la escuela" (The Myth of the School).³⁷ The article recounts an Andean myth of how the Spanish school systems, and thereby the Spanish colonial imagination, came into being in the Andean world. The myth is a cosmic encounter amongst the Andean deities Inca, Mother Earth, Jesus Christ and Naupa Machu. In the myth, Jesus Christ and Inca are both sons of God. Jesus Christ, the younger of the two sons, becomes jealous of Inca, who has two children with Mother Earth. Responding out of his jealousy, Jesus Christ looks to the Moon, who gives him a page of writing. Jesus uses this page of writing to frighten Inca. Once Inca became frightened by the writing that he does not understand, he runs away and dies of hunger. While Inca is away, Jesus Christ breaks the neck of Mother Earth and builds churches on her body. Naupa Machu, the deity that precedes Inca in Andean cosmological history, is pleased by the death of Inca and plot's to eat his two sons. Now orphaned, Naupa Machu then lures the sons of Mother Earth and Inca to his mountain known as School. While there, Naupa Machu lies to the two sons and tells them that Inca no longer loves their mother, Mother Earth, and is now friendly with his brother Jesus Christ. To prove this to the two sons, Naupa Machu shows them the writing from the Moon and like their father,

³⁷ Alejandro Ortiz Rescaniere, "El Mito De La Escuela,," in *Ideología Mesiánica Del Mundo Andino: Antología De Juan M. Ossio A*, ed. Juan M. Ossio A (Lima: I. Prado Pastor, 1973).

they flee. This myth describes the death of the image of the land, Mother Earth, and the death of indigenous language and symbol. Commenting on this myth, Constance Classen writes,

The Inca flees the writing because it represents a way of life which is incomprehensible to him. He dies of hunger—the lack of ritual offerings and worship. The cosmos is then plunged into a state of disorder in which Western sacred structure can devitalize the Earth and impose itself on her, and Naupa Machu, the personification of anticulture previously kept at bay by Andean sacred structure, is free to act. Naupa Machu resides within the school, which thus becomes the abode of anticulture....³⁸

In this and elsewhere, Classen affirms her central thesis: the symbol system of the West (anticulture), which affirms itself via writing, need not be the de facto symbol system for those Andeans still looking to regenerate their cosmovisions as a means of delinking from the Spanish colonial imagination of space. This indigenous imagination of the land (or space) as “Mother Earth” is decolonial in so far as it is an alternative to the Western imagination of the indigenous land as property, resource, and commodity. Classen suggests that persons, as exemplified by the myth above, who want to re-generate their indigeneity for decolonization, have an option in writing new narratives to explain the colonial imposition. However, she is careful to note that over-dependency on the written language threatens the oral forms of Andean meaning and meaning-making.

Within this example of the Andean encounter with the Western notion of space, the land is seen as a personified/deified subject, Mother Earth, and not a commodified object. The people have a personal relationship with the land that

³⁸ Constance Classen, "Sweet Colors, Fragrant Songs: Sensory Models of the Andes and the Amazon," *American Ethnologist* 17, no. 4 (1990): 725.

reflects the relationship amongst deities. In decolonial thought, this clash of imaginations and their respective implications for life are often collectively referred to as the geopolitics of knowledge. There are two major decolonial entry points into the entanglements of geopolitics. One comes from the indigenous peoples (as exemplified in the Inca myth above) caught up in anti-colonial movements, and the other comes from academic decolonial theorists who analyze the texts of modernity that reflect the geo-politics of the Western World. An example of the academic entry point is Walter Mignolo's analysis of Kant's Geography and the ways in which *The Geography* assumes the T and O map³⁹ of Christendom. Mignolo argues that the T and O map, and the Kantian Geography that proceeds out of it, is one of the foundations for imagining the space of Europe as the space of reason. Such a cartography violates and dislocates the value of non-European knowledges.⁴⁰ To this point he writes:

The epistemic trick to which Kant so much contributed goes as follows: first in the sphere of the enunciated it was stated that there are four continents and four races; second, in the enunciation, it was only within the white race that knowledge-making took pace and that it was decided that there are four continents and four races. One of the races (white) and one of the continents (Europe) was the house of enunciation. The rest were enunciated but were denied enunciation. Epistemic racism was part and parcel of Western epistemology, and modern European languages, embodying the spirit of epistemology,

³⁹ The T and O map is a medieval map of the world that divided the world into three major land masses: Asia, Europe, and Africa. Each illustrated land mass was also thought to represent one of the three human races. The map developed out of the biblical references to the sons of Noah. One of the early developers of this map was Isadore of Seville. I mention it here as an example of how space can be imagined by human groups. For more on the T and O map see: David Woodward, "Reality, Symbolism, Time and Space in Medieval World Maps," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 75, no. 4 (1985). For a decolonial reading of Eurocentric geography see: Walter Mignolo, "The Darker Side of the Enlightenment: A De-Colonial Reading of Kant's Geography," in *Reading Kant's Geography*, ed. Stuart Elden and Eduardo Mendieta (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011).

⁴⁰ Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity : Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, 155.

became trumpeters of the known (rhetoric of modernity) and the gatekeepers of the unknown (logic of coloniality).⁴¹

With this, Mignolo reveals the assumptions implicit in Kant's *Geography* and *Anthropology* which reflect the colonial/imperial imagination of the world.⁴² The colonial imagination is that which interprets the lands and inhabitants of the Aztec's and Maya's as the Indies and Indian. It is this epistemic erasure that Mignolo wants to see as constitutive with the rise of Modernity. Coloniality, then, from Mignolo's perspective is not only the economic and political disenfranchisement of the indigenous but also the epistemic estrangement that results from the imposition of the colonizer's logic which is built on the imperial framework and the theological assumptions of space (i.e. the T and O map).

This move towards a more robust treatment and acknowledgement of the epistemic differences of the planet beyond the imperial and colonial differences is what Mignolo sets out as the work of decolonial theory in the academic setting. However, this only gets at a meta-level of analysis and is mainly concerned with providing a philosophical basis for "shifting the geography of reason."⁴³ Such a move is not the achievement of an epistemology. Instead, it is an argument that attempts to turn us towards non-European epistemologies, fragmented as they may be, in order to focus on *spatially situated* (read by Mignolo as Andean) types of questions and problems for thought. It is important to note that the focus on space does not

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² For more on Kant's idea of race see: Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, "The Color of Reason: The Idea of Race in Kant's Anthropology," in *Postcolonial African Philosophy : A Critical Reader*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1997).

⁴³ Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity : Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, 137.

lead to a pure or more *native* starting point for thinking. Instead, the de-colonial turn to space is about the recognition of the geopolitical entanglements of knowledge that occur as a result of colonial/imperial expansion into other locales that enunciate reality differently.⁴⁴

I see the space of the Americas as that which has to be reinvented and wrested from the colonial imagination, if it is to offer a decolonial option for living, thinking, and being. In regards to creating an option for those that suffer from the effects of colonialism and coloniality, Black Theology, Womanist Theology, Black Feminist Theology and Latino/a Theologies have dedicated much thought. The

⁴⁴ As a reminder, the geo-politics of knowledge refers to the entanglements that result from: the theologies of Christendom, the critique of theology by the enlightenment; the rise of secularism, the post-modernist critiques of secular and Christian meta-narratives; the European critiques of the modern state and economics; the cultural/racial nationalisms; and the indigenous anti-colonial projects. In these entanglements race and nation (nation read as an interpretation of space) often get reworked as both oppressive and liberationist concepts. For instance, the project of Pan-Africanism created an idea of Africa that melded together thousands of languages and histories for the sake of recovering the continent from the European colonial imagination of it as a “dark continent” whose inhabitants were in need of conversion and civilization.

From the colonial perspective, Africa was imagined as the land of resource and commodity that required a substantial civilizing mission as a requisite for sustaining capitalistic and soteriological (Imperial Christendom) interests. Both of these ideas, Pan-Africanism and Colonial Africa, reconfigured the imagination of Africa in ways that were increasingly alienated from the tribal-based notions of land and community. These conflicts often lead anti-colonial leaders in Africa to see their futures mainly through transforming the imagination of the tribal lands of Africa into nation states. From this example, one can see how the imagination of space as “nation” has multiple trajectories.

Similarly, race has had a long problematic history in terms of how it is conceived politically. Particularly in the U.S., the coloniality of race is often entangled with attempts for liberation from racial apartheid. Race, as Franz Fanon sets out to show in his *Black Skin White Masks*, functions very similarly to a neurosis that makes black persons slaves to their inferiority and whites slaves to their superiority. As the two racialized groups push to affirm their humanity within racial confines, Fanon argues that both groups approach an alienation from their respective foundations of being. Fanon’s work teases out the spatial relationships of this when he argues that blacks of the Antilles who know their African origins would prefer to be known as being from the Antilles rather than being understood as African. In this move, Fanon affirms the neurotic like state of self-hatred that sees becoming racially superior as the only option for achieving “humanity.” For more on this see: Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/ Freedom: Towards the Human, after Man, Its Overrepresentation-- an Argument,” *The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 291; M. Kebede, *Africa's Quest for a Philosophy of Decolonization* (Rodopi, 2004), 141-67; Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 53-59.

developments of these fields of theological thought are responses to the aforementioned entanglements of the spatial and racial imagination that are constitutive with the rise of Western modernity. In general this work understands modernity as the globalization of Eurocentric epistemology, politics, and social organization that occur via colonization and the occupation of the Americas.⁴⁵

Following this understanding of modernity, my work on the blues speaks to what I see as a particular problematic feature in the theological treatments of the blues that do not share this decolonial reading of modernity. In particular, I see a distinguishable difference between my reading and the readings offered by Kelly Brown Douglas and James Cone.⁴⁶ In order that my reading will remain distinguishable from theirs, it is necessary that I provide a brief analysis of how my decolonial reading departs from their reading. Most important and distinguishable in my reading is my attention to the land of the Mississippi Delta Region. I see this location as a space affected by a deep wound that is inflicted by the activity of settler colonialism.⁴⁷ This activity extends from the earliest forms of Spanish colonialism via Hernando De Soto and continues to the present through the occupation of the Delta Region by global market corporations. In distinction from Douglas and Cone, I

⁴⁵ Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein, *Geopolitics and Geoculture : Essays on the Changing World-System, Studies in Modern Capitalism = Etudes Sur Le Capitalisme Moderne* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1991).

⁴⁶ James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues : An Interpretation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991). Kelly Brown Douglas, *Black Bodies and the Black Church : A Blues Slant*, 1st ed., Black Religion/Womanist Thought/Social Justice (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

⁴⁷ This wound of colonialism is characterized by the Indian Slave Trade, the Coalescence of Indigenous Tribes and a host of other dynamics that drastically changed the pre-contact Indigenous American world. For more on this see: R. Ethridge, *From Chicaza to Chickasaw: The European Invasion and the Transformation of the Mississippian World, 1540-1715* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010). R.F. Ethridge and S.M. Shuck-Hall, *Mapping the Mississippian Shatter Zone: The Colonial Indian Slave Trade and Regional Instability in the American South* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

read the blues primarily as a narrative that seeks to make sense out of its connection to the deep loss that flows from settler colonialism. Douglas and Cone primarily read the blues as an expression of an underappreciated cultural artifact in black American identity. While neither of them are blind to the history of settler colonialism, their proximity to the pastoral concerns of black Church life and the concerns of anti-black racism are central to their arguments.

For both Cone and Douglas, the problem facing blues people is the problem of anti-black racism and its intersection with gender and sexual oppressions. I find their focus on race to be insufficient as a means of naming the dynamics that situate the blues within the histories of Spanish, French, and English settler colonialisms. These colonialisms resulted in the violent dislocation of Mississippian peoples through genocide, war, the spread of disease and forced migration.⁴⁸ Chattel slavery,⁴⁹ which would dislocate African ethnic groups from their indigenous lands to the Delta Region, is constitutive with the ongoing oppression and erasure of the American indigenous peoples and their visions for the land. The blues and blues people emerge at a point when black American visions for life in the Americas were no longer confined to the institution of chattel slavery.⁵⁰ While Cone and Douglas are not blind to the importance of the land for human living, the primary thrust of their works are concerned with what they articulate as black life in a “White

⁴⁸ Ethridge, *From Chicaza to Chickasaw: The European Invasion and the Transformation of the Mississippian World, 1540-1715*.

⁴⁹ Woods, *Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta*, 46-49.

⁵⁰ Amiri Baraka situates the emergence of the blues as a kind development that hinged upon the relative freedom of black Americans after the emancipation this freedom allowed for black persons to consider themselves more as individuals and provided more self-determination as it related to leisure. This period extends 1865 with to 1901. Baraka, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*.

World.”⁵¹ This attention to racial experience misses critical opportunities to read the blues as an activity that dislocates the imagination of race.⁵² Race, while analyzed, is never dislocated as a category of asserting difference and meaning in the thought of Cone and Douglas. As such, the externally imposed binary of blackness and whiteness continues to set their focus on the problem of white supremacy. As such, the blues is primarily produced by this external imposition onto so-called white and black persons living in the U.S. South. As Catholic theologian, Steven Battin, recently argued at a conference on philosophy and struggle, Cone’s critical theological method proceeds from his indictment of white theologians who proclaim, interpret and analyze the gospel message with little concern for those living human beings, specifically black human beings, that undergo oppressive experiences similar to the peoples in the gospel message that receive preferential concern by Jesus. Battin self-described his theological project as one that generally accepts Cone’s challenge of holding Western white male Protestant theologians accountable for their denial of the liberation ethics present within the biblical text and within U.S. black church traditions. Furthermore, Battin, in concert with other black American Catholic theologians,⁵³ recognized Cone’s

⁵¹ Douglas, *Black Bodies and the Black Church : A Blues Slant*, xxxiii, 72, 10. James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, Rev. ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997); Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues : An Interpretation*.

⁵² Marcella Althaus-Reid speaks about this in her text *Indecent Theology* in regards to the dislocation of heteronormative Christian conceptions of God, Jesus, and the Virgin Mary. Indecent theology she argues seeks to constantly “re-contextualize liberation theology” by responding to developments that require the dislocation and “indecenting” of theological, political and sexual assumptions that maintain hegemonic epistemologies of determining legitimate and illegitimate sex. Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology : Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics*, 6-7.

⁵³ Here I am specifically thinking about M. Shawn Copeland, Brian Massingale and Philip Linden Jr. Of these, Battin’s analysis is most similar to Linden’s. See: Bryan N. Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2010); M. Shawn Copeland, LaReine-Marie Mosely, and Albert J. Raboteau, *Uncommon Faithfulness : The Black Catholic Experience* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis

theology as a challenge to Catholic theology as well. What is unique about Battin's response to Cone's challenge is his contention that Cone's indictment of the silence of modern theology to black suffering should be situated at a different level of concern, "Civilization." Drawing on insights from John Mohawk, Battin contends that the historical idea of Civilization has within it the organizational imagination that informs the civilizing mission that is integral to modernity. Civilization⁵⁴ as an analytical frame helps to situate what is globalized through the *civilizing* projects of colonialism, capitalism, and slavery. Where Cone's work correlates enslavement and racism with the oppressed of the Gospel Narrative, Battin's work sees the oppression of human groups that do not prescribe to Civilization as the historical problem to which Christian liberationist theologies must remain vigilant. "Non-civilization" or the "Non-Civilized," in Battin's work, names those modes of living and organizing that are distinguishable from Civilization.⁵⁵ Following Mohawk's lead from the American indigenous perspective and Cone's challenge from the black American Christian perspective, Battin looks to the Hebrew Bible and the Gospels to locate narratives from the oppression of non-civilization. Following insights from

Books, 2009); M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom : Body, Race, and Being, Innovations* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010).

⁵⁴ Battin describes Civilization, following John Mohawk as a system of social organization characterized by surplus production centralized religious-political power, social stratification, the specialization of labor, and an unequal distribution of surplus goods produced by a lower social strata. See: John J. Mohawk, *Utopian Legacies: A History of Conquest and Oppression in the Western World* (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 2000); Steven Battin, "De-Civilizing Missions: Grassroots Struggle for Indigeneity as the Locus of Black Catholic Theological Epistemology" (paper presented at the Philosophy Born of Struggle: Embodied Philosophy & Epistemologies of Liberation, University of Connecticut, 2015).

⁵⁵ Battin, "De-Civilizing Missions: Grassroots Struggle for Indigeneity as the Locus of Black Catholic Theological Epistemology."

J.P.M Walsh⁵⁶, Battin finds that proto-Israel reflects decentralized, egalitarian modes of organization which are distinct from the Davidic monarchy that is charged with a monotheistic Yahwism. With Walsh, Battin contends that monarchy and strict monotheism did damage to Israelite vernacular culture and their more egalitarian epistemologies. Battin's analytic frame of non-civilization along with the insights of decolonial theory and its attention to the colonial difference is what characterizes my reading of blues history.

My reading of the blues departs from an epistemic difference rather than a racial difference. While I am sure that Cone and Douglas might be sympathetic to this reading, it is clear to me that their commitments to the critique of anti-black racism and their response to the pastoral concerns of black churches still remains the primary target of their concern. One example of this is Cone's release of *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* and Douglas' latest text, *Stand your Ground*. Both texts take up the problem of black suffering and ethical failures associated with recognizing and attending to black persons.⁵⁷ These monographs do expand the concerns of their earlier articulations, but for the most part these texts are still primarily concerned with the visibility of "black bodies" and the violence enacted against them. This violence is the violence of Civilization and coloniality. Further, the violence read as racial violence is likely to continue even if racial ideology is brought to a close or mitigated by economic security. Non-civilization, while it has

⁵⁶ J.P.M. Walsh, *The Mighty from Their Thrones: Power in Biblical Tradition* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004), 43-48.

⁵⁷ This sentence is not meant to suggest that these texts are wrong headed. Rather it is only meant to show how the focus of these texts continues to be fixed on anti-black racism. See: James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2011); K. Douglas Brown, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2015), 11.

been racialized through colonialism, is primarily under attack because of its epistemic difference and its threat to the epistemological underpinnings that inform the politics of Civilization. The blues, for me, is a reflection of non-civilization not because it is a cultural production from the racialized, but because of what it says differently about life in relation to the land. My assessment echoes what Spivak cautions with her articulation of “the subaltern.”

Spivak argued that the subalterns are those who cannot leverage the hegemonic epistemology or discourse because of their location outside of it.⁵⁸ Race, as Quijano argues, is a part of this hegemonic discourse. As enslaved chattel, the African ethnicities that endured slavery were subalterns— they could not leverage the hegemonic epistemology and discourse. As Spivak proclaimed, “they cannot speak.” In this subaltern space they sung the Spirituals and shouted sermons, but were not seen as theologians; they moaned the blues hummed work songs, but were not seen as musical virtuosi— nor should we assume that they wanted to be. They were chattel, owned property for the purpose of labor. After the emancipation, those born to southern plantations were faced with the ambiguity of being free but not free enough to counter Civilization. During the Reconstruction, they were able to participate in Civilization through black male suffrage, agricultural and domestic labor, and artisanship.⁵⁹ This participation, however, was compromised heavily by the failure of the Reconstruction and the reconciliation of the Confederacy with the

⁵⁸ Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 284-85.

⁵⁹ Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet : Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 164-68. Woods, *Development Arrested : The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta*, 68-71.

Union. The restoration of the Union snatched black suffrage from one of the largest voting blocs per capita in black American History, a bloc that might have been even larger if black women were permitted suffrage as well.⁶⁰ Now this is the historical juncture that greatly effects how the cultural production of the Blues is read. Are we to read suffrage, citizenship, and wage labor as signs of a black American self-organized vision for life or as capitulation to Civilization and the gains of settler colonialism with its various civilizing missions? In the light of this question, the exclusion and repression of the blues by Afro-Christian churches raises an epistemic question as much as, if not more than, it raises an ethical question relative to anti-black racism (more on this below). With Battin, Spivak, and coloniality in mind, participation in Civilization (via suffrage and free wage labor) is read as a type of melancholy tragic moment. It cannot be read as a triumph because it is always leveraged upon the violent erasure and forced migration of the Mississippian Peoples from the Delta region. To illustrate this, let us consider an assessment made by Douglas.

In her text, *Blues Bodies and the Black Church: A Blues Slant*, Douglas' articulation of the Black Church's failure in remaining ethically responsible to the bodies of blues people is significant and provides a way for us to understand the differences between the racial approach and the decolonial approach offered in this text. I quote her at length to help clarify this difference:

In as much as the blackness of the black church is predicated upon responding to the needs of black bodies, the black church is a body centered church. The black church at its best is an institutionalized response to the calls of black bodies. For the black church to adopt a narrative that

⁶⁰ Ibid.

denigrates or diminishes the primacy of the body in any way is to adopt a narrative that is by nature anti-black...Such is the case with the narrative of civility.

Again, southern migrants (to Northern U.S. cities after the failure of the Reconstruction) are illustrative of this. The migrant class was defined by the way in which their bodies were engaged in labor and in worship. Because their bodies were the central resource for their labor, as opposed to their minds, they were considered body people. These black men and women whose bodies were exploited in labor were regarded as people who gave into the indulgences of their bodies in unacceptable and indecent ways. The first thing to be noted is that just as white narratives have defined black people by the work they do seeing them as laboring beasts instead of as human beings—so too did the civility-oriented black churches of the migration era. The nature of one's labor virtually defined the nature of one's character. It became the mark of one's identity....laboring men and women were deemed as virtually out of control mindless bodies.... It is unsurprising that the black church would not look to the blues as a resource to navigate the white world (74).⁶¹

Three things are of note in Douglas' assessment: civility, black labor and black bodies. Douglas' analysis turns on the problem of civility and how it determines black identities and the privileges amongst them. Black identity, in this case, is communicated through the body and its proximity to manual labor (and elsewhere color proximity to whiteness). For Douglas, a civil identity is an identity that is unattached to body-centered labor and sensuality. The adoption of civility by black churches amounts to an ethical failure in so far as it privileges civility over the ethical mandate of caring for bodies. With this in mind, sensual existence, represented as manual labor, is signified as uncivil and remains beyond the boundary of ethical concern and ethical living. Further, sensuality disqualifies bodies from the receipt of care. In Douglas' analysis, there is a qualitative difference between body labor and mind labor. While Douglas is critical and against the

⁶¹Douglas, *Black Bodies and the Black Church : A Blues Slant*, 74.

narrative of civility and how it conflates labor and identity, the qualitative difference between northern mind labor and southern body labor is left undertreated. Further, labor is viewed primarily through the lens of black identity. It is identity and the privileging of certain identities over the other that makes civility and its adoption by the Church an ethical failure. For Douglas, the blues presents a body problem or, more specifically, a black southern rural body problem. Black southern rural bodies are bodies who are made visible by blues vernacular, discourse, and music. Douglas adopts this visibility to name and reform the northern black church's ethical failure to care for southern black body people. Both body and identity are the categories on which black Church ethics are won or lost. While Douglas communicates elsewhere that the repression of the blues is a repression of the body, and the knowledge that comes from the body, identity and the racialized body are still the primary focus on which her argument turns. The underrepresented black body is the site of knowledge, and black identities are the site of difference and privilege that demand ethical treatments.

Alternatively, I contend that the cosmological and epistemic difference and the activities that flow from them should be the primary frames for reading the blues. Cosmology, epistemology, and activity lend themselves to seeing the demarcations of difference without an *a priori* commitment to ethical discourse. Ethical discourse from a decolonial perspective must remain under scrutiny until it can be proven to be intimately related or harnessed by the subaltern perspective.

⁶²As will be shown below, following the insights of Dipesh Chakrabarty, there is a

⁶² For more on this see *Liberationist Ethics* by Enrique Dussel.

need to provincialize the Judeo-Christian, Eurocentric, and colonial racial differences in order to read history from the subaltern perspective. Applying this to Douglas' reading, we could say that labor and the organization of society are not only body problems but they are epistemic problems that proceed from the foundations of epistemic domination. As such, we could argue that there is no real qualitative difference between Douglas' mind labor and body labor, both are exploited for the purposes of modern progress that remains constitutively linked to coloniality and its function in Civilization. Further, the ethical commitment for the Black Church to care for black bodies will fail if it does not construct an alternative to exploitative labor practices that exceed the boundary of bodies and race. To follow Douglas' argument, receiving bodies into churches and caring for them is ethical but it does not remedy the problem of labor as labor. It only serves to care for the bodily wounds of those damaged by labor. This is needed and is a crucial pastoral concern. However, the blues also has a different narrative to offer and that is the narrative of a life in relationship to the land. Such a perspective on the blues dislocates racial identity, civil identity, and labor-based identities to understand the blues as an epistemology and a cosmology rather than a basis from which to indict an ethical reform of black churches and their relation to black people.

Now back to the Blues and the Delta. The remainder of this work shows that the Delta Region, and its inhabitants, are effected by: the commodification of the land; the extraction and significant imposition on the flora and fauna; the augmentation of water ways, the relocation of flood plains through damming, the removal of thousands of Hard Woods, and the rerouting of the Mississippi River.

These processes are geared more towards maintaining a Plantation extraction economy than they are about continuing a legacy of White supremacy.

As such, what I will explicate is the history of how the blues epistemology and cosmovision carves out a life way. According to Clyde Woods and other historians the blues life way is one that is repressed by the Mississippi Plan for Development and its epistemology of plantation based domination. By dislocating the use of race as a hermeneutical starting point and embracing coloniality, my project looks to recover the epistemic difference that the blues makes in distinction from those Eurocentric epistemologies that vision the Delta region as a plantation. Decolonial movements that re-envision a human relationship with the land are not significant because they offer an ideological or romantic return to a pre-Colonial essence. Rather, they are significant because they decenter concepts such as Kant's *representative* geography and anthropology that substitutes itself as the achievement of geographic and anthropological universality, or as Mignolo would argue as "objectivity without parenthesis."⁶³

All attempts at decolonial and anti-colonial life will have to struggle with the fact that they cannot replace one universalist objective geography for another. Instead, the decolonial turn posits that all objectivity is spatially situated and that Kant and other European thinkers present us with European studies of world history rather than actual World History. Their excellence and their failures must be hinged upon their geographic location rather than by an ideological universality or

⁶³ Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity : Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, Latin America Otherwise: Languages, Empires, Nations (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 209.

objectivity, such as the one suggested in Kant's Geography. Those seeking to decolonize their imagination of space should leave behind, as Mignolo argues, the modern notion of "objectivity without parenthesis."⁶⁴ In this way, objectivity is not global but spatial and caught up in the geo-political entanglements that influence the imagination. Myth's, stories, and other cultural productions are oftentimes clues that offer a glimpse into other modes of being situated, such as Fanon's notion of the inventive subject, and how those negatively racialized by the coloniality of power work to re-imagine themselves in the space of the Americas and the Caribbean.⁶⁵ In order that the focus on space does not also recede into the space of "objectivity without parenthesis," this dissertation sets a boundary of region as a limit to the imagination of space.

Following the thought of Clyde Woods and other insights on the cultural production from the Delta Region (the southeastern part of the United States), I will be mining the phenomena known as the blues that is constitutive with the land development projects (sometimes referred to as the Mississippi Plan or the New South) of the Mississippi Delta.⁶⁶ These projects collectively unfold a regional history of the commodification of Native American land and the racialization and commodification of all its non-land owning inhabitants. It is in this complex regional

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 204.

⁶⁶ For a historical overview of the land development projects often referred to as the Mississippi Plan see: C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913, A History of the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951). See also W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America 1638-1870, Harvard Historical Studies* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1896); W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America : Toward a History of the Part of Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2012).

history that the spatial imagination of black Americans is conflicted with the emergent industrialization of the plantation model which dominated, and in some cases decimated, African and Native American views of the land. Woods describes this period as an “arrest” of the blues plan of development.⁶⁷ With this, Woods articulates how the planters (large plantation owners in the U.S. South) of the Delta Region used white supremacist propaganda, terror, anti-black suffrage politics, and legalized disenfranchisement in order to disrupt and prevent any insurgent plan for the lands of the Delta Region that decentered the plantation model as the primary option for development. Seen through Woods’ insightful assessment of the geopolitics of space in the Delta Region, peoples of the Delta Region and their culture can be understood as one that makes strides to determine their own relationship to the land, but are often thwarted by the mobilized ideology of the plantation bloc and its development project known as the Mississippi Plan. In this plan, all forms of organized small farmers, populist movements and sharecroppers were relegated to the margins of society. It is to the blues that this proposal now turns.

The Blues as a Response to Coloniality

The blues, both as a temporary state of feeling in low spirits and music/idiomatic dance, arises in this milieu of the Mississippi Plan and the industrialization of the plantation economy. This occurs across the majority of the southeastern parts of the U.S. Clyde Woods has characterized the phenomena of the

⁶⁷ Woods, *Development Arrested : The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta*, 21.

blues as an epistemology that has both cultural and political implications. Woods' epistemic characterization of the blues is the analytical thread used here to connect the blues with the indigenous decolonial options for living and thinking. Similar to the indigenous movements that regenerate their own episteme, such as the Incan myth mentioned above, the emergence of the blues epistemology rises as an alternative to the ways in which the plantation bloc, black Protestantism, and black middle class social movements understood the entanglements of race and space in the Delta Region. Woods' characterization of the blues as an epistemology⁶⁸ provides a way to re-interpret the post-Reconstruction history of the Delta Region that delinks it from the implicit coloniality in black Protestantism and black middle class social uplift movements on one hand, and the plantation bloc of power on the other. While Woods is not the first to speak of the blues as a deep symbol-making matrix, he is one of the first to see the blues as an epistemology rather than a parallel development of the Eurocentric idea of "art," which situates art hierarchically lower than the cultural production of rational thought.⁶⁹ It is this type

⁶⁸ The reader should note that I find Woods' description of the blues as an epistemology to be limited. Woods' "blues epistemology" is limited in so far as it imposes an *essentially* black form of knowing that is distinct from white forms of knowing. This is an unfortunate turn in Woods' otherwise helpful read of the blues as "a way of knowing." In distinction from Woods, my decolonial read of the blues understands it as a trans-racial (moving beyond the boundary of race) rather than a racialized form of knowing. For Woods' interpretation of blues epistemology see: *ibid.*, 29-31.

⁶⁹ The arguments over how to interpret the cultural production of black Americans are replete throughout the emergence of African American Studies as well as the Harlem Renaissance. Particularly at the time of the Harlem Renaissance, writers such as Zora Neale Hurston and others thought that the cultural production of the blues as well as black Southern dialect were phenomena to be rigorously researched and considered rather than dismissed as relics of a primitive past. However, there were many African American elites who thought that the folk traditions of the South were an embarrassment and an impediment to political progress. *Ibid.*, 37-38. For more on this see: Lisa Hollenbach, "Phonography, Race Records, and the Blues Poetry of Langston Hughes," in *A Companion to the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. C. Sherrard-Johnson (Hoboken: Wiley, 2015), 301-16. ;S.B. Charters, *The Legacy of the Blues: A Glimpse into the Art and the Lives of Twelve Great Bluesmen : An Informal Study* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1977), 18, 63.

of Eurocentric thinking that often has led to a negative stereotype of black Americans. This negative stereotype over-determines the prevalence of the “artistic achievements” of black Americans as a proposed sign of their inability to achieve “higher forms” of rational thought. Woods reminds his reader that the blues simultaneously expresses an emergent body politic (thought) as well as artistic creativity. With this turn, Woods decolonizes the view of the cultural production of the blues from the Eurocentric idea of art that would devalue it as primitive folk art. Woods’ move towards delinking the blues from the colonial interpretations (I will elaborate on these interpretations more below) is enabled by his critical geographical read of the imagination of space in the period in which the blues emerged. Woods reflects this when he writes:

At its most fundamental level, the blues expansion was the full expression of the rise of *an* (emphasis is mine) African American culture that was self-conscious of its space and time and, therefore, fully indigenous. The South was the space of origin, the African American hearth. It was the only place where the blues could be celebrated daily through a whole range of interactions with people and nature. They accompanied those who worked on the levees and roads, and in the forest, fields, and prisons. They surrounded them at home, in their neighborhoods and juke joints, and at picnics, churches and the other uncensored spaces where African Americans explored the parameters of their daily life, spirituality, and vision.⁷⁰

Here, Woods’ focus on the South as the space of origin decolonizes the view of the Delta Region in two ways. First, it decolonizes the land from the planter’s view of it as a resource solely for the continuation of the plantation economy. Secondly, Woods’ work deconstructs the intra-racial expression of colonial imposition that occurs in the debates over whether or not African Americans should see the

⁷⁰ Woods, *Development Arrested : The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta*, 108-09.

southern land as their “home land” or create homes in the industrialized cities of the North. Woods, in contradistinction from those that would easily see black culture as a more national phenomenon, argues that the “space of origin” for African American culture was the South. This is a radically different take on the idea of African Americanness as a racial phenomenon and characterizes it as a more regionally situated indigeneity.

Anti-essentialist critiques might find fault in Woods’ statement concerning “origins” of African American culture. Some might fear Woods is asserting the space of the South as an origin in a way that sees the southern reality as an essence. However, along with Woods, this dissertation contends that locating the origins of African American culture in the South is not an ideological essentialism. Instead, it is an attempt to root the emergent complexity of African American life in centers where there was a level of space and autonomy for African Americans to determine their views of the world on their own authority. Woods highlights that the question of origins and indigeneity can be better understood in terms of space. When space is adopted as a hermeneutical tool, the intra-racial differences concerning progress and development can be more clearly assessed. Woods’ works shows that there were and are multiple visions for the future of African Americans in the U.S., especially with regard to how they understood their relationships to the land. In Woods’ analysis, those who fled the land for the industrial life of the North and the living quarters of the urban ghetto had a vision for the future that was caught up in creating racial equality in terms of equal access to the urban landscape. On the other hand, those who decided to stay in the South and organize themselves around the

land had different visions of progress and often had a vision for the land based on autonomy rather than equality.

Mound Bayou, Mississippi is one historical example of this. As Woods and others report, Mound Bayou was a self-governed black American town in southern Mississippi organized by local farmers, artisans, teachers, and other skilled persons. The town began as a result of the Freedmen's Act in which the federal government divided up several plantations of former Confederate Army leaders for purchase. Caught up in this land grab was a plantation owned by Jefferson Davis. Davis' Warren County plantation, known as Davis Bend, was purchased in 1866 by his former slave, Benjamin Montgomery. Montgomery and other recently freed black people transformed Davis Bend into a self-governing cotton farming community until the year 1878. In 1878 the land was repurchased by Jefferson Davis. However, in 1888, Montgomery's son, Isaiah, organized with other families from the disbanded "Davis Bend" settlement and purchased 1500 acres of forested land from the LNO&T railroad company. This purchase became the basis for the cotton town known as Mound Bayou which at its height in 1907 had grown to 800 families. As a self-governing community, Mound Bayou provided a center of commerce for several hundred black Farmers who tilled the surrounding soils.

While Mound Bayou lives in both legend and in fact, what is significant about its story is how the lands of the South were interpreted as a viable and sustainable future for black communities living in the Delta Region. Similar to their small farmer white counterparts, black persons recently freed from the bondage of enslavement saw a future in finding a viable relationship with the land. Mound Bayou and other

towns that were organized by African Americans in similar ways threatened to dismantle the monopoly enforced by the planters and their enforced tyranny over the lands and peoples of the South. The history of Jim Crow and the southern prison economy is primarily aimed at preventing the organization and self-governing impetus for black Americans in the South. The hope inspired by self-governing communities of African Americans was crushed at every turn by the planters wielding their white supremacist propaganda and dismantling the trans-racial relationships of the small farmers (both white and black) who were organized to end the enforced monopoly of the planters over the land. The history of the Populist movement in the southern states is replete with examples of how racial differences between white and black farmers, workers, and sharecroppers were set aside for the sake of gaining freedom from the tyranny of the planters.

Etching out the geopolitics of the Delta Region is significant because it reveals the boundaries implicit in the people's geographical imagination. These boundaries were not only a matter of philosophical concern. Instead, it was also a matter of survival. The story of many people who lived in the Delta Region is reflected upon in the cultural production of the blues. As Woods argues, blues music and the peoples that create and relate to it express an indigeneity that is located and grounded in space. Following and revising Amiri Baraka's assessment of African Americans as "blues people," Woods posits a geographical or spatial interpretation of the formerly enslaved peoples who remain in the South during the Reconstruction and Post-Reconstruction era. In line, but in distinction from these thinkers, I want to delink the terminology of blues people from the racial identity

reflected in both Woods' and Amiri Baraka's interpretation of the blues. The move to delink is not to undercut Baraka's and Woods' contribution of revealing the lines of demarcation, which help to highlight the emergence of a cultural center that differentiated *some* formerly enslaved African Americans from the other inhabitants of the Delta Region. This cultural center has been referred to in many ways by intellectuals and scholars of African American life. Some have referred to it as "black experience," others have referred to it metaphorically as a "river of struggle" or as "wilderness experience."⁷¹ It is not my intention to jettison the contribution of these terms to theological hermeneutics. Instead, my recovery of Baraka's term "blues people" is an attempt to affirm a *bounded* complexity of people living through the struggles of life in the Delta Region.

By bounded complexity I mean to clarify that peoples organized into a group are always heterogeneous. However, critiques of essentialism, and as an instance of this, the critique of so-called "ontological blackness" conceal another phenomenological given: the reality of boundedness, of collective reality.⁷² As can be seen in communities like Mound Bayou, formerly enslaved African Americans as a colonized/racialized group had many ways of developing themselves in the United States. The boundaries enforced upon this group and generated by this group shift, reconfigure, mutate and give rise to something new but the something new is not

⁷¹ For the river of struggle see: Vincent Harding, *There Is a River : The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), xviii-xxi. For the wilderness experience see: Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness : The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2013), 110-22.

⁷² For an explanation and critique of ontological blackness see: Victor Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness : An Essay on African American Religious and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 110-23.

unbounded. As with other “living systems” within reality, social groupings have “membranes” that determine, if only in a haphazard, ad hoc way, who belongs within, and who is not included in that belonging. These borders may be conditioned and delimited by geographical habitation, language, cultural customs, ceremonies, and imagined kinship. Similarly, we could consider the idea of the Nation-State or the development of the catch all racial/ethnic category of Anglo-Saxon as a type of border as well.

Those “individuals” within a local region, who share the same language customs, ceremonies, and complex knowledge systems, while at the same time engaging in sometimes fierce contestation over the meaning and viability of shared words, customs, ceremonies, and social economic practices may be called a people. This is the sense of peoplehood I invoke throughout the proceeding pages and with my use of the term “blues people.” In this dissertation, as exemplified in the references to the local history of a group of formerly enslaved African Americans from Mound Bayou, I am concerned with the life world and thought ways of those who inhabit the Mississippi Delta Region of the United States.

In referring to the Delta people group (and those who carry on their epistemological legacy elsewhere in the U.S.) as *blues people*, I am not engaging the language of race, nor am I engaging the implicit colonial logic of “race” that is synonymous with the rise of the “Occidentalism” referred to above. The blues people are a people, as defined above. They are not a race. The color reference “blues” should not distract the reader from this distinction. Throughout this work I use the term “blues” as “deep symbol” in the community of people who serve as the

locus of my theological reflection. It is a term expressed and operationalized within the cosmovision of the people, who preach, sing, stomp, moan and shout the blues. The people are not identified according to a color, “blue,” but to a phenomenon, “the blues.” Furthermore, I privilege “blues” over the socio-geographical term “Delta” (without dismissing the latter) because the former foregrounds the “emic” voice of the native (the within knowledge) rather than the etic voice of the sociologist, geographer, anthropologist, etc. (the knowledge of the *all-knowing* outsider looking in). I make these distinctions on the foundation of what was referred to above as Mignolo’s concept of delinking from the colonial/imperial idea of “objectivity without parenthesis.” With Mignolo, I affirm that objectivity, while often relied upon by human groups, is always bounded to a particular understanding of time and space. As is suggested in the colonial/imperial T and O map, colonial objectivity has relegated indigenous peoples of the Americas and Africa into a European notion of “the past.”

Blues people, I contend are victimized by a similar kind of relegation to the past and are seen as a representation of the primitive. The primitivization mobilized against blues people is along geographic and ideological borders in the United States. The primitivization mobilized against blues people is along geographic and ideological borders in the United States. As Mignolo argues in his text *Local Histories and Global Designs*, hegemonic people groups that enforce their interpretation of the world onto the “local histories” of other peoples forcibly “design” the globe (global design) such that it fits their hegemonic imagination of

time and space.⁷³ The history of blues people is an expression of a “local history” that realizes itself in and beyond its confrontation with the planters of the southern region who “design” the entirety of the Delta Region landscape and its inhabitants as a sustainable plantation. ⁷⁴ As Woods clarifies, the blues people develop their epistemology and ways of understanding development that are often at odds with those African Americans who saw hope in “achieving equality” in the urban and sub-urban centers of the of the United States. In distinction from these moves, the blues people’s outlook on development was situated in affirming themselves in sustainable relationships with the land. As stated above, their focus on sustainability is exemplified in the history of Mound Bayou and other groups dedicated to affirming their autonomy from the hegemony of the Plantation State by cultivating both the soil and their sense of community.

Theologizing with the Blues

Using the above decolonial reading of the blues as a basis, I submit that there is a theological transcript implicit in the development projects and cultural production of blues people. Woods secularizes this transcript when he argues that blues music and epistemology are an expression of black “civil religion.” In labeling blues people in this way, Woods, like other commentators before him, bifurcates blues people from their theological underpinnings in black Protestantism, the memory of African Traditional Religions, as well as their interactions with others in the Americas. This interpretive move by Woods performs one aspect of coloniality in so far as it

⁷³ Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs : Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, 21.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

“modernizes” the blues within the western secularization project. In this move, Woods affirms the blues as the achievement of a “black” version of the secularization project that flows from the critiques of modernity internal to the Eurocentric idea of the West. This move is an example of the negative performance of the global design. Labeling the blues as a racially bound version of secularity suggests that the contribution of the blues is mainly reflective of the colonial turn towards the secular. Describing the blues as secular would require affirming that the blues and blues epistemology has within it an implicit or explicit disavowal of God and theism. Woods’ more epistemological and political concerns distract him from taking up this task, which I think is more squarely a theological task. Moreover, I see it as a decolonial theological task that is focused on articulating a theological option with those who have, on their own authority, made a decolonial turn towards what has been referred to above as land based autonomy (and also democratic self-governance). In distinction from Woods, this dissertation argues that the “secularity” suggested in the blues is not solely driven by a bifurcating move towards an African American version of the secularist notion of “civil religion.” Withstanding the assessment that cultural and epistemological productions can have multiple meanings, I assert that the blues could also be interpreted as a cultural production that suggests a decolonial turn towards *other* revelations of the Divine. This, as argued above, is evidenced in how indigenous peoples—of which the blues people are an integral part—imagine and develop the land as an option for life in contradistinction from projects of suffrage and nationalism. Black Theology and Womanist Theology have performed a move that mimics the logic aforementioned

as Woods' "secularizing" the blues in so far as they have "theologized" the blues by setting it up as a hybrid phenomenon that reflects the theologically rooted categories of sacred and profane, or in its more modern formulation, sacred and secular (here, secular is not a replacement for the profane, but a validation of phenomena that are not the exact opposite of sacred). Theologizing the blues is not inherently wrong in my estimation. However, my intent is to distinguish my work from *theologizing* the cultural production of the blues. My work counters this move by constructing a decolonial option for theologizing *with* the inherent theological content in the blues. This requires, as stated above, shifting the focus from *the produced space* to *the space of production*.

While my theological intent is primarily constructive, it is important to also distinguish why there is a need for a constructive theological project on the blues. In general terms, the theological problem that my construction is aimed at resolving can be understood as the politics of the *mediatory* content of revelation. Because I do not take up this question across the corpus of western theological thought on revelation, the reader should recognize that the scope of the politics of mediatory content pertains to the dynamics suggested above as the geopolitics of knowledge in the Delta Region. These geopolitics unfold in multiple directions, but my approach is to focus on the mediatory content of blues epistemology that is caught up in the geopolitical entanglements of race and the critiques of race. It is this entanglement that often veils the theological content implicit in the material history and episteme of blues people. One problematic feature that helps to highlight this entanglement is the development of what has become normatively understood (as well as critiqued)

as “black experience” *amongst* BWBF theologies. As illustrated above with the discussion on Douglas and Cone the black/white binary can militate against projects of decolonization that are aimed at dislocating the ideology of race. This is especially the case because of how black life is also signified through notions of the secular and the sacred *amongst* black /womanist and black feminist theologies. These binaries, black/white and secular sacred, in general, find their foundation in the conditions made possible via the colonial imagination, and therefore begin from the basis of what it means to be *produced* specifically as it refers to the racial hierarchy implicit in the Occidentalism of the Americas. Black experience, then, is a complex of results that proceed from the project of racializing the darker skinned labor force from their Yoruba, Dahomey, Igbo, Akan, Fon, etc. settings. Using the theological themes of suffering and poverty, BWBF theologies have worked to construct theologies that provide a theological option via liberation, reconciliation, hope, and salvation for those that are marginalized by racialization and gender-based oppressions amongst African Americans (these are not the only theologies in the Americas that deal with race, but they are the ones I am focusing on). This has largely been because of the need felt by BWBF theologians, to respond to what they have observed as a crisis of identity amongst African-Americans (resultant from the enslavement and its successive expressions). The identity crisis is prompted by coloniality which works to divorce enslaved Africans from their foundations, homelands, cultures and epistemologies.

For many African American theologians, confronting the problem of identity has a lot to do with articulating the identity of the racialized/ enslaved peoples of

Africa. By recovering and, in some cases, constructing a firmer conceptualization of identity (via the black experience/ black religious experience), these theologians assert that a way can be cleared towards a theological option that affirms the black experience as a new locus for theological reflection. In this move, the normative theological ideas such as estrangement and alienation are shifted from their universal meanings in European and “white theology” and located in the experience of racialized being, i.e. “blackness,” or the experience of dealing with racialization. Identity, however, does not tell the whole story amongst all African American and theologians of color at-large; some theologians dealing with the realities of the racialized have endeavored to shift the focus from identity to culture and theodicy. Two examples of this shift are the works of Robert Hood and William R. Jones. Hood roots the problem facing African Americans and other ethno/racial groups as cultural hegemony and Jones roots the problem in what he terms a theodicy of divine racism. These two works are significant in how they display a theological performance of the decolonial turn in so far as they endeavor to find a foundation that decenters and potentially delinks itself from the “produced foundation” of race that undergirds racial identity and, therefore, the theologies that see it as a locus of theological reflection.

Before I present and assess these two thinkers, it is important to remind the reader that “decentering” and “delinking” are both understood as thought experiments aimed at providing a theological option in solidarity with those already on the move towards decolonization through activism and everyday living. With this in mind, this section is not aimed at *proving* the viability or *success* of historical

projects that are actively doing their own versions of decolonizing. Instead, my dialogue with Hood and Jones is aimed at revealing the difference between the racial/identity approach and the foundational theology/cultural approaches to theological reflection. It is the latter that I think moves towards a decolonial loci for theologizing within critical theological thought (amongst people of color). Pushing beyond Jones and responding to Hood's challenge, I will offer that critical theology, and black theology in particular, needs decolonial foundation(s) if it is to continue its path towards human liberation in the entanglements of the modern/colonial imagination of space.

Towards a Decolonized Theological Option: A Dialogue with William R. Jones and Robert E. Hood

Let us begin with Jones, as his option is closer to the *method* of delinking and Hood's option is more akin to clarifying the *decolonial cultural content* that can ground a delinking project. In his text, *Is God a White Racist* (here after as ISGWR) written in 1973, Jones provides an analysis of the implicit and explicit treatments of the theodicy of divine racism in the theologies of James Cone, Albert Cleage, Deotis Roberts, and Joseph Washington and Major Jones. In his critique of these theologies, he analyzes their collective claim that God must be against the ethnic oppression of racism. For Jones, the theological claim that God is against anti-black racism requires a *foundational* argument that articulates two points. First, it articulates what kind of God would permit racial oppression. Secondly, it articulates a rationale for why God would permit suffering in the form of ethnic oppression. This requirement is driven by what Jones sees as a shared position of anti-quietism in

black theology. Quietism is generally understood here as silence to, or acceptance of the injustice of anti-black racism.⁷⁵ For Jones, it is not only the end of anti-black racism that is the goal of the anti-quietism position, but anti-quietism is aimed also at bringing an end to a particular notion of theism; namely, the theism of a benevolent God. The benevolent God theism upholds a divine foundation for affirming racial oppression as deserved and/or permissible. Without going too far into the details of Jones' analysis, it is clear that Jones clarifies the shared burden of black theologies (and I would add BWBF theologies in general) to prove that their theology of God is not dependent on a theodicy of divine racism. The theologians chosen by Jones serve as archetypes of black theological responses to the theodicy of divine racism. Jones' analytical tool for reading these archetypes can be summarized as follows:

If the benevolent God is not a white racist then God must reveal God's allegiance with the oppressed by an act of liberating them (read as black Americans) from racial oppression. If there is no evidence of God's intent to free blacks from racial oppression, then God must see racial oppression as permissible and is therefore a racist.⁷⁶

Such a God would also find quietism as not only permissible but expected. All of the theologians examined by Jones have a rebuttal to the basic question: Is God a white racist? In Jones' assessments, he finds that the theologies above fail to meet the standards required to hold together the benevolence of God with the simultaneous demand on God to be against racial oppression. They fail, in their respective ways, because their theism of an absolute benevolent God is incommensurable with their

⁷⁵ William R. Jones, *Is God a White Racist? A Preamble to Black Theology*, 1st ed., C Eric Lincoln Series on Black Religion (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press, 1973).

⁷⁶Ibid..

need for God to affirm and reflect their commitment to anti-quietism and the struggle for black liberation. Except for Albert Cleage, none of the above theologies make a case for a different God besides the benevolent God. Cleage, unlike the other theologians examined, shifts the *theistic foundation* from a benevolent God to a black God. Cleage is safe from Jones' critical apparatus of divine racism in so far as his theism, a black God, provides a foundation that disentangles God from the incommensurability of "benevolence" and the theodicy of divine racism. As a caveat to his assessment of Cleage, Jones reminds his readers that League's "Black God" is likely a product of League's more pragmatic concern of organizing religious black Americans for socio-economic and political revolution. Withstanding this consideration, League's approach amongst the others is unique in its provision of a Black God as a theistic option. Cleage's theistic option, a Black God, circumvents the theodicy of divine racism because a Black God would not contradict its being by permitting racism. While unconvinced by League's "Black God," Jones notes that it is the only option amongst the others that provides an alternative to the theistic foundation of a benevolent God.

As an alternative to the above approaches, Jones provides his theistic option of humanocentric theism. Drawing on the insights of what he understands as secular humanism (and latter black radical humanism), he articulates that "humanocentric theism" is the idea that humanity, and not God, are responsible for the existence of ethnic racism. Therefore, Jones argues that humans alone bear the burden of causing and ending racism. Jones contends that his anthropocentric theism moves closer to the threshold of theism without traversing the commitment to a

monotheistic benevolent God. The impetus for his movement towards the threshold of theism is the traction that secular humanism gains him for cultivating human responsibility without the foundation of a benevolent God as a necessary component in the pursuit of liberation. Of course, Jones contends that black theology cannot withstand an end to theism. According to Jones, such a move would not only prove problematic for theological disciplines in black theology, but also for the communities to whom black theology is responsible, communities who are unwilling to embrace a reality without God. With this general summary of the main points of Jones' work in place, I will now turn to a decolonial analysis of his work that moves with Jones' method but beyond his option of anthropocentric theism.

Moving with and Beyond Jones

The title of this sub-section, "With and Beyond Jones," highlights the major contribution that Jones' work provides in shifting the focus of black theology from racial identity politics. These identity politics are caught up in reconciling "black experience" with a benevolent God. Jones' contribution is after a new Doctrine of God, one that affirms the potential of humans to overcome oppression based on the qualities endowed to them by *their* God. As a reminder, the overall objective of this section on Jones is to show that Jones' contribution sheds lights on the method (i.e. shifting the focus), but not the content of a new foundation for theologizing in light of anti- black racial oppression. Shifting the content and, from this, the form of thought is the aim of the decolonial turn at-large as well as this dissertation's call for a decolonial theological option. Read against the decolonial backdrop, Jones is still, to use Mignolo's term, not yet delinking from the "Occidentalist loci of enunciation"

which are not rooted in the produced space of the modern/colonial world. Mignolo describes delinking as a dislocation of the Eurocentric Cartesian logic of "I think therefore I am" and shift towards the decolonial principle, "I am where I think." Jones' replication of "I think therefore I am" is reflected in *IGWR* when Jones turns to secular humanism as a basis for his humanocentric theism. In distinction from Jones and his more contemporary followers, such as Anthony Pinn, I am not convinced that humanism, theistic or otherwise, is viable as a foundation that would recover theology from the problematic set out by Jones.⁷⁷ From a decolonial perspective, I contend that the problem is not the theistic foundations, but the colonial foundations. Theodicy and secular humanism are arguments internal to the western problem of reason and as such are part and parcel of the production of modernity and its constitutive production of coloniality. That Jones does dialectics between his "black secular humanist tradition" and the Eurocentric secular humanism is telling of this problem.⁷⁸ Without an established decolonial ground it seems that Jones' problematic will only be repeated at the level of human experience, in which humanists will set themselves as the subjects on which Jones' critical apparatus will continue to reflect the contradictions that he formerly conferred on his selected black theologians. In other words, the problem of divine racism and divine

⁷⁷ Anthony B. Pinn, *The End of God-Talk: An African American Humanist Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 139-40.

⁷⁸ In his notes Jones distinguishes his form of secular humanism from the secular humanism posed by Paul Kurtz in *In Defense of Secular Humanism* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1983). Jones' argument is an attempt to ground secular humanism as a part of a black development that proceeds from "the devil songs," which some argue are the foundations of blues music. I disagree with his cultural move here in so far as he never does any rigorous cultural analysis to prove the secularity of the "devil songs." I will return to this point in some detail in the body of the dissertation. For now, suffice it to say that this nuance in Jones is worth exploring further. See Jones, *Is God a White Racist? A Preamble to Black Theology*, 216.

benevolence will have their "humanocentric" analogues. Put another way, humans would be the new beings having to wrestle with the incommensurability of human goodness (formerly read as God's benevolence) and their compliance or inability to defeat racist structures (formerly read as the theodicy of divine racism). Jones' apparatus, applied at the human level, suggests that humans experience the same embarrassment, previously assigned to God, of an inability to actualize their "goodness" in a world where ethnic/racial oppression is the norm.

Because of this shortcoming in content, I contend that another more radical foundation is necessary, one that is decolonial. A decolonial location dislocates the black tradition of naming moments of excellence in black culture as expressions of predetermined political, economic, and theological ideas based primarily in the Eurocentric or "occidental imagination" (see above section on Occidentalism). While I admit that this is sometimes unavoidable, when it must be used it should be done with extreme caution and with a rigorous allegiance to the spatial imagination, episteme or cosmovision of the subaltern group. With this in mind, a decolonial theological option should allow the selected cultural productions of the people group in question to *do work on* the analytical and hermeneutical tools for excavating culturally diverse forms of revelation. I will return to this matter on revelation later, but for now, suffice it to say that the politics of cultural hegemony make a difference for how one understands the mediations of God's self-disclosure. With these critical points on Jones' content and his option of humanocentric theism in mind, we now turn to Hood's option for those doing theology in contexts victimized by cultural hegemony.

Hood's Must God Remain Greek

Hood asks a different foundational question: Must God Remain Greek? In distinction from Jones' theism question, Hood shifts the locus for theological reflection from the experience of racial oppression to the cultural question of whether or not Graeco-Roman culture is the only culture that can mediate God's self-disclosure. The reader should note that the experience of racial oppression is not absent in Hood's analysis. Hood, however, is more focused on the cultural production produced by those who endure the systems of racial oppression. Also, Hood's assessment of cultural production is bounded by geographical awareness. Hood's approach shifts the focus and the geography of theological investigation. Hood makes a case for critically decentering Graeco-Roman metaphysics and culture as the default foundations that mediate Christian revelation. Hood's argument rests on his understanding of culture as that which "nourishes and fuels the way persons, a community, or a people understand relationships within themselves, between themselves and their neighbors."⁷⁹ With this in mind, Hood contends that the Graeco-Roman culture should have no monopoly on mediating the revelation of God in Jesus and the other forms of revelation. Hood's method of approach proceeds by a process of contextualizing Christian doctrine within Graeco-Roman culture. Hood's intent of contextualizing Christian doctrine in Graeco-Roman culture, history, and metaphysics proves the particularity of Graeco-Roman Christianity and gives him a basis to deconstruct "sacrosanct mentality" towards Graeco-Roman culture as the only mediation of revelation. To this point he writes:

⁷⁹ Hood, *Must God Remain Greek? : Afro Cultures and God-Talk*, 101.

...even though demographics impress us that the Christian faith is growing rapidly in politically liberated African and Afro Caribbean Third World cultures, which have their own theologians and churches, still determination of the content of authentic Christian doctrine about Jesus Christ and the Spirit remains in the hands of their former Eurocentric and American overlords. Hence a kind of ecclesiastical neocolonialism... The concern is how to demythologize this legacy's [Christianity's] sacrosanct Graeco-Roman character so that there is a genuine conversation between Christian thought in Afro cultures and Eurocentric cultures.⁸⁰

With this, Hood sets out his call for a reconsideration of Christian doctrine from the perspective of non-Graeco-Roman cultures situated in the Caribbean, South Africa, and West Africa and amongst African American cultures (Hood collectively calls these cultures Afro-culture). Hood's critical assessment of the ways in which the peoples that make up these cultures adapt to Christianity, represents a theological move towards the decolonial in that it suggests the need to delink from the Graeco-Roman interpretation(s) of revelation. Of particular interest to Hood is the notion of Spirit.⁸¹ In his survey of the cultures of the Caribbean, South Africa, and West Africa, Hood argues that the presence of spirits, especially those of the ancestors and good spirits within Afro-cultural cosmologies are often ostracized at best, and demonized at worst, when interpreted through the lens of the Nicene notion of the Trinity. Hood contends that the Nicene interpretation of God relies heavily on the Greek ideas of *hypostasis*, *consubstantiality*, *ousia* and *homoousia*.⁸² These culturally rooted ideas work well for the Graeco-Roman world view, but when placed in the world of spirits in Afro-cultures they only stifle the cosmology of spirit and how the spirit

⁸⁰ Ibid., 237-40.

⁸¹ Ibid., xxvi.

⁸² Ibid., 99.

intimately infuses itself in everyday life. Hood's work illuminates the geographical boundary of the Afro-cultures and their respective notions of spirit and then begins to read the Christian tradition in a way that remains faithful to the homegrown cosmologies of the locales referred to above. While Hood is careful to admit that not all of the Graeco-Roman mediations of revelation are culturally bound, he is insistent that the tyranny of Graeco-Roman, European and American cultural hegemonies must aim towards critical conversation between cultures.⁸³

The Decolonial Contributions of Robert Hood

As stated above, Hood's work moves to find a new foundation of thinking through the Christian concepts of God, Spirit and Jesus from within the existing worldviews of colonized and formerly colonized peoples. His move towards new centers of theological thought is not uncritical. He is always careful to note that a reactionary syncretism which uncritically appropriates both native knowledge and European knowledge, is not an adequate replacement for Eurocentric Christianity. However, Hood asserts that the work of translating the spirit world of Afro-cultures into the Christian faith is an ongoing process. In this way, today's syncretism could be tomorrow's local doctrine as the faithful better understand the life-worlds and meanings that precede and follow colonial Christianity. Hood's work opens a door to reflecting on the mediatory role that culture plays in the process of revelation. In recognizing the indispensability of culture from revelation, Hood makes a call for the end of Graeco-Roman culture as the *defacto* culture and metaphysics of the Christian theological imagination.

⁸³ Ibid., xxiv-xxv.

Recovering Blues and Blues Epistemology: A response to Hood and a move to De-center Black Experience

With Hood and Jones in mind, the particular problem that prompts the need for a decolonial option is firmly established. Following Hood's insight, I contend that a decolonial option for U.S. theologies of color is needed. This need rests in the fact that black theologians often use race and racial experience in ways that mimic the cultural hegemony of Eurocentrism. Very few works in theology have considered the inherent nationalism or inter-nationalisms that undergird racial ideology. As a result, the location of the black experience is often understood too broadly and is disconnected from how different groups affirm themselves as groups in and outside the boundaries of "black experience." Through the use of Clyde Woods' critical geography of the Delta Region and Mignolo's theory of decoloniality, I contend that blues music and blues epistemology open up ways for understanding God's self-disclosure in people groups, land, and music or the sonic. Because these cultural phenomena are caught up in the complexities of modernity; decoloniality and critical geography are tools that assist in clarifying the colonial dynamics that influence how theologians and historians interpret the blues and its relation to Revelation.

Blues people, I contend, affirm a unique relationship to the land and project an imagination of the land as an option for survival in the Americas. Recalling Frantz Fanon's insight that humanity in the post-colonial space is about *invention*⁸⁴, blues

⁸⁴ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1991), 200.

people are *inventing* not only their identity but their indigeneity that is an alternative to the colonial imagination of the land, operationalized in the planters and their Mississippi Plan. The Mississippi Plan terrorized the Native Americans, white small farmers, and the formerly enslaved African Americans in the Reconstruction and Post-Reconstruction eras. By drawing on the material history that is concomitant with the emergence of the blues, my aim is to mine and recover the theological content in the blues desire for land, autonomy, and connection to the divine reality through the sonic. Using the blues people and their cultural, political and economic productions as an example, I will suggest that their theological option for the God of life is not only a God that responds to the sufferings of a racialized people, but a God that responds to the struggles of a people working to reaffirm the sacred nature of the land and intra-racial human relationships. The themes of sensuality and the many references to the natural and constructed landscape of the Delta Region in blues music affirm a vision of the reality. Blues historian, Albert Murray, suggests that this vision “counterstates” the ritual system of black Protestantism that privileged conversion and freedom from the temptations of sin as the highest form of freedom.⁸⁵ Blues as a counterstatement articulated its idea of freedom that countered the repression of sensuality and the extension of this repression into the body politic that governed black peoples of the Delta Region.

⁸⁵ Albert Murray, *Stomping the Blues* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976), 254. Murray’s approach tries to affirm a new form of Americanness that rivals the white supremacist notion of American. With this, Murray contends that a new understanding of African American Art is needed. Much of Murray’s text deals with the debate over whether or not the production of the blues is folk art or high art. This argument is caught up particularly in the culture wars of African American scholars who are attempting to decipher the complex meanings of African American art. See also: Albert Murray, *The Omni-Americans : New Perspectives on Black Experience and American Culture* (New York: Outerbridge & Dienstfrey, 1970).

This counterstatement was aesthetic, spatial and institutional as seen with the creation of the Saturday Night Function known as the Juke Joint. As these institutions gained appeal amongst those who disagreed with the repressive body politic of black Protestant churches, churches began to use these institutions as symbols of retrogression amongst African Americans and also began to demonize them. Womanist theologian, Kelly Brown Douglas, has argued that this demonization is significant because it reveals that black churches had not developed a sufficient response to deal with the sexuality that became a new frontier of exploration after enslavement. Repression of the complexity of sexual life was often suppressed to deal with more pressing matters of racial oppression. For the sake of expediency, racial uplift movements often constructed and enforced a desexualized black identity to counter the hyper-sexualization of the black female and male bodies.⁸⁶

Blues music, from this perspective, is a people's account of their desire for a self-determined human life and dignity too often wagered at the bargaining table of white supremacist state power. Juke joints, and the blues music that filled them, provided a ritual response that was unachievable by the rituals which found their meaning in the Spirituals and Gospel music. However, the autonomy and desire expressed in blues music did not only live in the Juke Joints. This desire also

⁸⁶ Hyper-sexualization worked in two directions as a part of the machinery of white supremacist ideology. On one hand, it justified and decriminalized white male rape of black women by suggesting that black women are sexually insatiable and are therefore incapable of being violated by rape. On the other hand, the hyper-sexualization of the black male body presented him as an uncontrollable rapist who posed a threat to the coveted possession of the white female body. See Douglas, *Black Bodies and the Black Church : A Blues Slant*; Kelly Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church : A Womanist Perspective* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999), 81.

expressed itself in the move towards autonomy through the use and purchase of the land. This move towards autonomy reflects people's histories of towns like Mound Bayou, Mississippi, which saw freedom for better or worse through their direct relationship with the land. While it would be a mistake to see towns like Mound Bayou and others as bastions of ecological concern, it is important to note how their approach to the land as a basis for community, rather than domination, worked to decenter the plantation conceptualization of life. Together these three components of autonomy, land, and the blues work together in ways that prompt Woods' term "blues epistemology." Blues epistemology refers not only to the knowledge contained within blues lyrics but also the knowledge that moved towards political autonomy based on a self-determined relationship with the lands of the Delta Region. Woods' spatial interpretation of the blues reveals that the blues is a people's record of their discontents with the repressions of black Protestant piety, colonial civility, and the terrors of white supremacist mob violence. This autonomy was not only about the struggle for identity, but also a struggle for a geographical place to call home. Where some black political leaders saw full citizenship via suffrage as the option, blues people saw land based autonomy as their future.

The blues represents a move towards the land and autonomy that point to the sacredness of the land and its role in mediating God's presence within the community. The longing for the sexual and sensual embrace of unrequited and stubborn lovers chronicled in the blues shares this same reasoning. This desire for the sexual is not always libidinal, but is also a desire for the recovery of space where people can be sexual without the imposition of the colonial hyper-sexualization and

criminalization of the black body (in its secular and theological forms). Moreover, the recovery of the sexual and sexuality in blues music, also “counterstates” the respectability politics and conversion ideologies of the racial uplift movements. Inspired by black Protestant notions of Christian piety, racial uplift projects often made use of slogans such as “lifting as we climb.”⁸⁷ Slogans like this gave off an impression that the current state of being amongst working class blacks of the South was irredeemable and in need of transformation and conversion. Here, we can see that Hood’s articulation of cultural hegemony also plays out at the intra-racial level.

Blues epistemology as a term and an analytical tool are used to recover a sense of the difference in a way that can respond to the intra-group expressions of cultural hegemony. Blues epistemology does this work by holding together epistemic and spatial differences which cut across the universal of racial difference. Woods’ spatial hermeneutics provides a way to look behind the ontological hermeneutics of identity to reveal a geographical boundary of land which is imagined, acquired, lost, hoped for, left behind and revisited. The idea of land based autonomy has theological implications in so far as it relates to the Christian notion of God as a sustainer and creator of life. This dissertation posits that the land and autonomy within the blues epistemology are suggestive of an option for a relationship with the God of life. As an option, the land provides the space, in which people groups can experience God’s gift of life in its ecological form. As the land and its fruits become commodities and resources for the attainment of profit, indigenous

⁸⁷ Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism : Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*. Here, Davis interprets the blues as an emergent feminism that counters the form of feminism that emerged with black women leaders’ Victorian ideals concerning sexuality and morality.

groups oppressed by this transition often work toward autonomy (from colonial rule) so that they might reconcile themselves with the land as a reflection of life. Blues people are but one of these groups.

Recognition of the blues as a desire for indigeneity allows us to resituate Robert Hood's question—Must God Remain Greek?—from the perspective of the blues and the Delta Region. With the blues and the Delta Region in mind, one can ask, "Must Black theology remain black?" In line with Jones, this pushes not only the discipline of black theology to its threshold but all those theologies that ground themselves in racial identity. Blues and other indigenous projects challenge black theologies and liberation theologies at-large to delink from the colonial forms of determining differences via theological reason, race, gender, and the nation-state. If U.S. theologies have any hope of decolonizing the coloniality of power, it would seem that a focus on the production of art and culture at the borders of the colonial imagination might be the only route of "shifting the geography of theological reason." The production of the blues provides such an opportunity for theology to sing itself anew.

Conclusion

Blues, De-colonial theory, and Christian revelation do not present themselves as easy talking partners. However, as the history of modernity suggests, conversations with the subaltern are rarely easy and risk misinterpretation at every turn. Putting the blues, decolonial theory and Christian revelation in conversation puts into practice what Anthony Pinn articulates as "nitty gritty hermeneutics."⁸⁸ By

⁸⁸ Pinn, *Why, Lord? : Suffering and Evil in Black Theology*, 117.

nitty gritty hermeneutics, Pinn signals the need to leave the theological arguments of theodicy and redemptive suffering behind and begin to theologize from the deep complexities of black life.

Similar to Pinn, this dissertation considers the complexity of the racial marker of existential difference, blackness. However, in distinction from Pinn's move toward non-theistic African American humanism, this dissertation focuses on the de-colonial implications inherent in the cultural production of the blues and how it gives meaning to space in the face of black churches and plantation culture. Spatial consideration aims at understanding how blues performers and their communities saw themselves in relation to the space that was the Delta Region. With this understanding, I think one can better assess the emergence of a blues theology that affirms itself on the authority of those who see themselves in terms underappreciated by many black churches and mainline forms of black theological scholarship.

Interpreting historical expressions of decolonization is not simply a theoretical re-reading or interpretation of the "nitty grittiness" of history, but recognition of other enunciations of life, living, and humanity. Alternative enunciations provide an option against the impulse to theologize the realities of people groups for the sake of disciplinary and ecclesial allegiance. This dissertation suggests that it can be equally theological to embrace theological silence in hopes of coming into contact with the other theological imaginations, which provides new opportunities for viewing the mystery of God's self-revelation in history.

Chapter 2

Entanglements of Spatial Imagination in the Delta Region: Recovering a Blues Option for Decolonizing Revelation

Introduction

The Delta region, from which the blues emerges, is a region built on the imposed degradation of the American Indian world and its forced transition into the modern/colonial world. This chapter sets out the modern mechanisms of racialization and commodification and how they worked in/on the space of the Delta Region. As such, the chapter will contextualize the emergence of blues people and how they interpreted and struggled with the various plantation based development plans of the Delta Region at the beginnings of the twentieth century. Historiographies along political, social, environmental and religious lines will be significant in helping to articulate the Delta as one site of coloniality.

The first aim is to uncover the history of the spatial images of the Delta. These spatial historiographies situate the theological project in the political entanglements that emerge from how human groups image themselves in the location of the Americas. As argued in the first chapter, space—as a result of the conditions signified by “forced contexts,”⁸⁹ “the coloniality of power,”⁹⁰ and “the colonial difference”⁹¹—cannot be taken as naturally given. Instead, the spaces of the modern world and the worlds beyond its borders are understood as productions—

⁸⁹ Boodoo, "Understanding Church and Theology in the Caribbean Today."

⁹⁰ Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," ed. Mabel Moraña, Enrique D. Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 181.

⁹¹ Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs : Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, 40.

that is activities produced by human invention. While no work in Christian theology can fully accept the claims of coloniality as exhaustive for determining reality, coloniality is helpful in naming the power dynamics that situate the subjugated or those objectified by the modern image of the space that is the Americas. By image of space, we mean the activity of giving meaning to physical locations. Secondly, the non-theological focus on space is meant to shift the mode of theological interrogation from the racial (ontological and ideational) to the geographical and environmental. To date, this racial mode of interrogation, about the blues, has brought attention to the meaning matrix that is blackness and or black identity. Victor Anderson, Delores Williams, Nestor Medina (concerning mestizo/a), J. Kameron Carter, and Willie James Jennings critique the ontological mode in their respective theological works.⁹² In agreement with these projects, *race*, is seen as a part of the machinery of modern domination which leads to epistemic oppression.⁹³ In turn, these epistemic oppressions prompt the need for thinking beyond strict ontologies and identities. The projects above have proceeded to think beyond ontological identity by expanding or deconstructing restrictive identities. In

⁹² For a deconstruction of racial ontology in Black Theological thought see: Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness : An Essay on African American Religious and Cultural Criticism*, Ch 1-3. For a deconstruction of black experience in the Black Theology, specifically in relation to black male experience see: Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness : The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, 143-69. For a critique of the trans-national problems concerning Latina/o interpretations of race see: Néstor Medina, *Mestizaje : (Re) Mapping Race, Culture, and Faith in Latina/O Catholicism, Studies in Latino/a Catholicism Series* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2009), Ch 5; For a critique of supersessionism and its relation to ontology in black religious studies, womanist and black theologies see: J. Kameron Carter, *Race : A Theological Account* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), Ch 3-5. For an analysis of the foundations of racial ontology from the medieval period and its legacy within modern theology see: Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination : Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 96-104.

⁹³ See Chapter 1 pg. 16-20. Where I set out the problems associated with using the idea of race in reference to human people groups.

distinction from these projects, this text gives attention to how human groups understand themselves via space rather than the constructed identities. The focus on space, rather than race, allows for a shift in the terms as well as the content of analysis. As such, spatial readings of cultural productions provide opportunities to deal with the images of the Americas that provide the ideological groundwork for racial identities. The analysis of identity politics stops short of this ground and, as such, often reifies the problems of spatial imagery in the form of nationalisms and regionalisms. In the decolonial school of thought, spatial analysis has often been referred to as the *geopolitical* mode of investigation—that is a mode of investigation focused on how human groups configure the globe under economic and geographical (or imaged) arrangements.⁹⁴ With geopolitics as the focus, the chapter gives a view of the entanglements of the spatial imaginations of the Delta Region. In all, the chapter provides a basis for the latter chapters, which highlight how the blues, as a spatial imagination, might inform theological reflection in the modern/colonial world.

With the above aims in mind, this chapter makes three major moves (organized in major sections). First, it sets out a thick description of the Delta as a space of production respective of the blues. Second, it distinguishes the space of production through the lens of geographical and environmental interpretations of the Delta Region. Third, these insights are put into conversation with the insights of

⁹⁴ Walter D. Mignolo, "The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference," in *Coloniality at Large : Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 251-56; See also: Ramón Grosfoguel and Ana Margarita Cervantes-Rodríguez, *The Modern/Colonial/Capitalist World-System in the Twentieth Century : Global Processes, Antisystemic Movements, and the Geopolitics of Knowledge, Contributions in Economics and Economic History*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002).

decolonial theory and the idea of the colonial difference. Together, these major moves will give environmental, geographical and historiographical insight into the colonial wound. The metaphor of the wound communicates the deep ruptures that the agents of the colonial world inflict on the environment and peoples of the Delta Region. With a picture of the colonial wound in place, a way will be made for better understanding of the statement that the blues makes about the “forced context.”

Blues Knowledge as a Reflection of the Space of Production

One consistent point that cuts across a great number of commentaries on the blues is its distinguishability from other black American cultural productions. In particular, there is an almost univocal fascination with the Afro-Christian⁹⁵ characterization of the blues as “the devils music.” This characterization of the blues music as the “devils music” is important because of how it relates to the colonial imaginaries of the globe that are used to interpret Africa and the Americas as either ungraced (theological dehumanization) or irrational (secular ideological dehumanization).⁹⁶ If we recall Mignolo’s critique (via Emmanuel Eze) of Emmanuel Kant’s *Geography* in the previous chapter, we are reminded that Mignolo finds issue with Kant’s assessment of reason and the Christian monotheistic faith. He argues that both reason and Christian religion, ideas situated in Europe and its imagined

⁹⁵ I use Afro-Christian here to refer to the Christianity that emerges from black American denominational churches. For more on this see: Carter, *Race : A Theological Account*, 6-9.

⁹⁶ For more on the idea of grace and rationality as anthropological and geographical ideals of modernity see: Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/ Freedom: Towards the Human, after Man, Its Overrepresentation-- an Argument," 20-24. For a theological treatment of grace and the dispossessed of the modern world see: Gustavo Gutiérrez, Caridad Inza, and John Eagleson, *A Theology of Liberation : History, Politics, and Salvation*, Rev. ed., (London: SCM, 2001), 84-85; Gustavo Gutiérrez and Matthew J. O'Connell, *On Job : God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987), 88-89.

Graeco-Roman/Judeo-Christian past, are *imposed* standards universally applicable to all humanity. As such, they become the basis for how Kant divides the globe up into spaces of reason and non-reason, rationality and irrationality. From a decolonial perspective, it is this spatial assumption that is operative in epistemic violence and enslavement which both have genocidal consequences for African, Amerindian, Celtic, and Native American peoples. History tragically reveals that it is quite easy to treat these groups with extreme levels of violence when outsiders understand them as geographically and anthropologically predisposed to a depravity of culture, faith, and reason.⁹⁷ By these anthropological and geographical standards of European thought, non-Europeans of Africa and the Americas were at best deemed *childlike beings* in need of development, and at the worst, disposable obstacles in the way of capital.⁹⁸ Where human beings indigenous to the Americas

⁹⁷ Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, *On Reason : Rationality in a World of Cultural Conflict and Racism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 115; Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity : Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, 3-14.

⁹⁸ The representations of non-Europeans by Europeans of the 18th and 19th century as childlike, primitive, and unable to adopt the European standards of development are vast and cannot be treated here, however, I have included below some that are most influential to the European imagination of Africans/ Negros: In literature see: Rudyard Kipling and Thomas James Wise, *The White Man's Burden* (London: Printed for private circulation, 1899). In Legal Writings see: *Code Noir, Ou, Recueil D'édits, Déclarations Et Arrêts Concernant Les Esclaves Nègres De L'amérique Avec Un Recueil De Réglemens, Concernant La Police Des Isles Françaises De L'amérique & Les Engagés* (Paris: Les libraires associez, 1743), In slave owner papers see: Jean Baptiste Labat, *Nouveau Voyage Aux Isles De L'amerique. Contenant L'histoire Naturelle De Ces Pays, L'origine, Les Moeurs, La Religion & Le Gouvernement Des Habitans Anciens & Modernes: Les Guerres & Les Evenemens Singuliers Qui Y Sont Arrivez Pendant Le Long S*Jour Que L'auteur Y a Fait: Le Commerce Et Les Manufactures Qui Y Sont Établies, & Les Moyens De Les Augmenter*, 2 vols. (La Haye: P. Husson etc., 1724). In travel writings see: David Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa; Including a Sketch of Sixteen Years' Residence in the Interior of Africa, and a Journey from the Cape of Good Hope to Loanda on the West Coast, Thence across the Continent, Down the River Zambesi, to the Eastern Ocean* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1858). In science see: Josiah Clark Nott et al., *Indigenous Races of the Earth* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & co., 1857); Arthur Gobineau, *Essai Sur L'inégalité Des Races Humaines*, 4 vols. (Paris: Didot, 1853); Arthur Gobineau and Robert Bernasconi, *The Moral and Intellectual Diversity of Races, American Theories of Polygenesis* (Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press, 2002). For a treatment of how these and similar documents work to influence the imagination of non-European peoples by Europe see: Andrew S. Curran, *The Anatomy of Blackness : Science & Slavery in an Age of Enlightenment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011); Margaret Rich Greer,

and Africa stood on this spectrum, was related to the degree to which these non-Europeans actively resisted European expansion in its cultural, political, religious and economic forms. To resist European episteme was resistance to rationality. To resist being rational was resistance to European standards of humanity.

The far reaching implications of this violent imposition on Native American and Amerindian life as well as the equally violent forced migration and enslavement of Africans, opens up a tragic, grotesque, and impassible wound in the spaces we know today as the Americas and the Caribbean. As suggested by Hood's question, "Must God Remain Greek?" and William R. Jones' question, "Is God a White Racist?" the activity of theology can be energized and enlivened when it draws from the living activities of people encountering the space in which they find themselves. For our purposes, the space in question is the Delta Region of the southeastern United States; which is a space that bears the mark of the impassible wound. As inhabitants of the Delta, many enslaved Africans and black Americans, have wrestled with the imposition of the Western Christian outlook and how it worked to give meaning to the space of the Americas, and the spaces of Africa from which trade interests forcibly dislocated them.⁹⁹

Walter Mignolo, and Maureen Quilligan, *Rereading the Black Legend : The Discourses of Religious and Racial Difference in the Renaissance Empires* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

⁹⁹ For more on the religious imagination of the enslaved Africans and black Americans see: Charles H. Long, *Significations : Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion, Series in Philosophical and Cultural Studies in Religion* (Aurora, Colo.: Davies Group, 1999), 188-89. Here, Long explains what he see as the three symbols that informs the religious experience of racialized communities known as black Americans. They are: (1) Africa as historical reality and religious image; (2) the involuntary presence of the black community in America; and (3) the experience and symbol of God in the religious experience of blacks. His assessment of these three symbols informs my thought concerning the emergence of religious expression and culture amongst the enslaved and their descendants. Of particular importance is how his use of the symbols approaches black religions from the historical condition rather than presupposed religious ideologies. For a further treatment of this see: James A. Noel, *Black Religion and the Imagination of Matter in the Atlantic World*, 1st ed.,

The emergence of the blues matrix of meaning complicates this already tenuous relationship to the Christian religion among enslaved Africans and black Americans in the U.S. This complication, created by the blues matrix of meaning, can be characterized as a shift away from the Judeo-Christian and Graeco-Roman ideas of the world. Further, the blues shift in focus gives less attention to the subjects of reason, *black* Americans, and more attention to the *geography* of reason, the Delta Region. The blues represented a significant shift from the more Christian based cultural productions that preceded the Post-Reconstruction era. Rather than interpreting their condition in correlation to the peoples of the Hebrew Bible and Gospels, the blues people were critically focused on the Delta Region as the primary space for engagement with the world (what we have described above as the colonial wound of the Americas). In this way, they produced, through thought, vernacular, music, song, and dance, local narratives that provided an alternative vision to the one being produced by black American churches.

Blues people made evident, similar to the insights of Hood, that the Graeco-Roman and Judeo-Christian life world— much to the chagrin of its proponents— could not comfortably set itself up as a monopolizing epistemology over the whole of black American life in the U.S.

This alternative vision of life in the blues recognized by many commentators as an emergent black secularity or a mode of existence that mimics the modern/colonial

Black Religion/Womanist Thought/Social Justice (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), Ch 4 and 8.

project and its turn toward secular and existential reason.¹⁰⁰ Counter to this claim, this text posits that the blues people speak through their epistemology and remain distinct from Afro-Christian notions of evil or modern notions of the secular. As suggested by the insights of Clyde Woods and Richard Wright (discussed below), the blues as a cultural production is based in a self-referential epistemology that produces a distinguishable vision for life. This vision reflects a desire to find an alternative to the modern impositions of the ethno-racial, gender, and class ideologies that take shape within the Delta Region. These ideologies are enforced and legitimated by the nation-state, churches, and the plantation culture that significantly determine life, especially amongst the enslaved and their descendants. In what follows, there is a conscious attempt to avoid a dualistic interpretation which ideologically splits the Delta Region into the world of the colonized and the world of the colonizer. Instead, the argument takes another critical step in the analysis to focus on how colonial ideologies take shape beyond the dialectic between oppressor and oppressed, colonized and colonizer, white and black, man and woman. Insider/outsider logics veil differences just as much as they expose differences. With these cautions in mind, the aim is to consider how colonial logics operate beyond the easily perceived binary boundaries of the colonized and the

¹⁰⁰ The representation of the blues as secular or sacred or a hybrid of the two is common in discourses on black American cultural production. Christian theological, musicological, ethnomusicological, historiographical and cultural studies projects usually represent the blues as budding secularity within black American culture. See: Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues : An Interpretation*, 103-13. Harrison, *Black Pearls : Blues Queens of the 1920s*, 139-41; Reiland Rabaka, *Hip Hop's Amnesia : From Blues and the Black Women's Club Movement to Rap and the Hip Hop Movement* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2012), 38-40; Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism : Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*, 129; Spencer, *Blues and Evil*, 35-46.

colonizer. Equally significant are the ways in which people groups (in our case blues people) affirm alternatives to the colonial vision of life within *their working imagination of time and space*.¹⁰¹

So that the blues as a cultural production might have the room to speak, it is necessary that we limit the assumption that the blues is an expression of the monolith signified with the phrase “black culture.” By limiting or bracketing “black culture,” the intention is to resist reading the idea of race back into cultural productions. This project is not the first to suggest the need for this limit.¹⁰² Anthony Pinn, in his works on the African American religious experience, has suggested that the use of cultural production, as a material for theological reflection in African American theology, has been uncritical of the processes of cultural memory. In particular, Pinn gives attention to the ways in which cultural productions get remembered as “decontextualized cultural artifacts.” By decontextualized, Pinn signifies the phenomena in which cultural memories of the past are constructed to meet the needs of the present.¹⁰³ Pinn’s insight is his critical recognition that there are multiple cultural memories operating in so called “black culture.” For some, “black culture,” especially concerning religion, is remembered as an emergence from an obscure and fragmented amalgam of Christianity and African Traditional Religions that came to a “maturity” mainly in the African Methodist

¹⁰¹ For more on the European space/time imaginary and its extension into the Americas see: Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," in *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, ed. Mabel Moraña, Enrique D. Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 181-82.

¹⁰² For criticisms of the category of blackness in theological thought see: Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Essay on African American Religious and Cultural Criticism*.

¹⁰³ Anthony B. Pinn, *Varieties of African American Religious Experience* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), 186 - 89.

Episcopal, Baptist, and other black American denominations.¹⁰⁴ This *emphasis* on the development of Christian faith amongst black Americans, in Pinn's assessment, represents a problem in cultural memory, specifically because of how Afro-Christians employ a limited cosmovision in interpreting the artifacts of black culture. The contemporary motivation for this emphasis, Pinn argues, is the need to legitimate black life in the face of the modern norm of Christian being. Pinn notes, via Karen Fields, that this urge to legitimate black life reflects the fragility of memory which ultimately fails. By failure, Fields highlights that cultural memory "leaves blanks and fills in blanks mistakenly."¹⁰⁵

Nevertheless, Pinn holds out that the fragility of memory does not require abandonment, but prompts the construction of an alternative to colonial Christian anthropology and other colonial ontologies (race, gender, and class). Alternatively, Pinn purposes a "theology of fragile memory and religious diversity" or an "archeological theology."¹⁰⁶ By "archeological theology," Pinn connotes the need to recover cultural artifacts in a way that rescues them from those cultural memories that have deemed them unimportant or marginal. In our case, both Afro-Christian cultural memories and the emergent move toward existentialist thought and humanism, amongst some American black intellectuals, *impose* memories of the blues. Therefore, our effort is to recover the blues from these imposed memories.

¹⁰⁴ Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

¹⁰⁵ Pinn, *Varieties of African American Religious Experience*, 192. See also: Karen Fields, "What One Cannot Remember Mistakenly," in *History and Memory in African-American Culture*, ed. Genevieve Fabre and Robert O' Meally (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

¹⁰⁶ Pinn, *Varieties of African American Religious Experience*, 194-95.

While Pinn is helpful in identifying the *over* emphasis on the Afro-Christian cultural memory in the interpretation and representation of black cultural productions, his ultimate analytic tool is black existentialism. In contrast to Pinn, the primary analytic tool in this chapter and the remaining chapters is decolonial theory. With this in mind, it is important to note that while there is a general agreement with Pinn's analysis of the intra-racial dynamics concerning cultural memory, the intra-racial dynamics of black Americans is interpreted in light of the larger complex of the modern/colonial world. Quijano's "coloniality" is helpful for us here and situates the intra-racial dynamics of cultural production. From the perspective of coloniality, the idea of the monolith, "black culture," is an expression of the colonial logic that legitimates cultural production via hierarchical distinction from other visions of life and over-representation that gives off the *illusion* of universality. Over-representation, as seen above with Afro-Christianity and its over-representation as the normative religious expression amongst black Americans, is one example of the idea that colonial logics defy easily identifiable insider outsider concepts of colonizer and colonized. In some instances, the colonized can appropriate the colonial logic for their own purposes. Because of this, colonial logics must be continually problematized and assessed in all their reincarnations and re-inscriptions, even amongst the colonized and formerly colonized. In this light, the Afro-Christian memory, when applied to cultural production, must be critically assessed for the ways in which it might reemploy the colonial logics as a means of legitimating or delegitimizing cultural productions such as the blues.

In the context of the Delta Region, the blues, as cultural production presents a moment that resists the legitimating tools of race and gender. Such tools are often used to signify black males and females as a *human* via their adoption of the foreign, the cults of manhood and womanhood, Western Christian Orthodoxy, secular reason, and suffrage. In contrast to these significations of humanity, blues practitioners expose, similar to Robert Hood's question "Must God Remain Greek?" the need to think beyond the ideas of the imposed reality. Blues, as an activity of meaning making, is radical in the traditional sense of the term, meaning from the root. Practitioners of the blues trust that the meaning they make, for better or worse, is an achievement determined by their engagement with reality. Superimposed frameworks of a Greco-Roman deity and a Western European Enlightenment mode of thinking provide neither the starting point, nor goal for the peoples that produce the blues.

Recovering the memory of blues as an activity of meaning-making through creative engagement with reality in a forced context discloses a hidden commonality between Afro-Christian and black critical intellectual meaning-making strategies. Claiming the blues as an emergent secularity or demonic cult only further situates it within the universal categories set out by European thought. Another way of saying it is that if the blues is secular, then we can, to a great extent, claim that as much as we know the secular so also do we know the blues. From the Christian cosmic perspective, we could say that as much as we know the activity of the Devil so too do we know the activity of the blues virtuoso. Such claims will not suffice. Further, we can see that the only thing accomplished in seeing the blues through the categories

of secular, and the Christian is a legitimation of certain black bodies over and against others. This supposed legitimation is a move to bring the racialized into the modern conversation concerning the conflict of faith and reason. Should this conflict be seen as the universal conflict facing all of human civilization? Engagement with this question is crucial if some decolonial way forward is possible. The blues vision for life, in all of its complexity, provides us with a peoples move to engage the Americas, both a given, and through the meaning that they give it. By digging through the critical geographies, environmental history, and other critical literature, the first major section of this chapter sets the ground for an alternative reading of the blues that resists the urge to legitimate it by aligning it with Judeo-Christian ideas on one hand and European secular reason on the other. The aim is to *excavate* the activity of the blues that makes it self-known in direct relation to the deep wound that is the Delta Region.

In the past, the theological implications of the blues and the contribution of the blues to African American culture and politics have often been buried in political commitments to Christian piety, racial identity, the politics of respectability, and the vanguards of Black Nationalist politics. Racial identity, which remains tethered to the coloniality of power, is most problematic in all of these political commitments and is damaging to the interpretation of the very complex history that emerges from blues people. Race and racial identity, when used positively, often claim a collective history for those African descendants who share a similar phenotypic skin color trait. This narrative, when over used, has the potential to do injury to the diverse narratives that emerge from the racialized. Rather than suggesting that racialization

provides the exclusive or main bedrock of the black experience in the Americas, the suggestion here is that people(s) imagined relationship to the land is also integral to how they organize and image themselves in the world. The spatial imagination or how the blues people imagine themselves in space has more to do with affirming an option for life than it does with affirming a new/revised racial identity. As such, blues people are driven by their desire for a way of living just as much, if not more so, than they are by affirming an *authentic* racial identity.

This desire echoes the decolonial turn, described by Mignolo in his reading of the histories of the Caribbean, Latin America, and parts of Africa. As a reminder, the “decolonial turn” has been a descriptor of the “other loci of enunciation,” besides those of Europe, that operate as foundations of thought and life. This move is not meant to erase the contributions of Europe pejoratively, but to, as one thinker writes, “provincialize” Europe. To provincialize Europe is to understand European thought as local to Europe and not applicable to the foundations of all human thought.¹⁰⁷ Mignolo and others have summarized the decolonial turn as a movement away from European centers of thought with the philosophical adage, “I

¹⁰⁷ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe : Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, *Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), xiii. The term provincializing Europe is used by Chakrabarty to signify a way of documenting the historical processes by which the reason of Europe, particularly Enlightenment rationalism, has been “made to look obvious far beyond the ground where it originated.” This does not mean a reduction of European knowledge to a “culturally specific” boundary. Such a move, Chakrabarty argues, is suggestive of a relativism that is not tenable with how ideas exported from Europe find new lives in non-European settings. Nevertheless, with this caution in mind, Chakrabarty’s decolonial project is aimed at analyzing and understanding European imperialism in global history and in India in particular. While the conclusions in his work come under scrutiny by Mignolo and others, it should be noted that his concept of provincializing not only Europe, but other centers of world thought, has influenced Mignolo’s concept of the colonial difference and his adage “I am where I think.” I make use of the term here to highlight it as an operating assumption, albeit a contested one, in Mignolo’s thought.

am where I think.”¹⁰⁸ From a theological perspective, I am arguing something similar. Doing theology in the modern/colonial world from a decolonial perspective requires us to provincialize the Judeo-Christian and Graeco-Roman articulations of God’s presence.¹⁰⁹ Remaining faithful to the presence of God in history may require us to confess more than the presence of God in the Jesus of first century Palestine. In addition to the Jesus of Palestine, we must also recognize the presence of God in the mundane everyday events of life where we are. Drawing on the decolonial adage “I am where I think,” I want to suggest that we find the presence of God where we are. In this case, the blues people find the Divine in the complex history of the Delta Region.

The Delta Space as Environment and Geography

Understanding the history of the Delta has much to do with how people imagine space. It is in this imagination that we can consider how people work out their relationship to the Divine and other theological ideas. Just as the hope for the Messiah and the end of Roman domination situated the recipients of the revelation of God in Jesus, the blues people’s hope for sensual love, sonic creativity, and life sustaining relationships with the land situates their potential reception of revelation in the Delta Region. Region and how the region takes shape under the imposition of coloniality are of extreme importance in accessing the often suppressed epistemology working in the cultural production of the blues. Assigning a grand meaning to this cultural production is not the intent. Rather, the aim is to

¹⁰⁸ Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, xvi, 80, 92, 117.

¹⁰⁹ Here I am echoing: Hood, *Must God Remain Greek? : Afro Cultures and God-Talk*, 2-10.

understand the dynamics of the blues context and how coloniality works to force the relationships that shape the Delta Region. While there are many modalities in which coloniality operates in the Delta Region, the discussion that follows will only focus on two: the geographical and the environmental.

The Delta Space in the Mississippi Delta Plan: Reading the Delta with Critical Geography

Clyde Woods interprets the Delta Region as a space that has undergone seven major phases. Historians studying the Delta Region have referred to these phases as the Mississippi Delta Plan.¹¹⁰ Woods employs methods from critical geography to interpret the geo-political implications of the Mississippi Plan. In general, critical geography is a discipline that understands geography as a discursive process that gives meaning to the lands and waters of the earth. As such, geography is both spatial and political-economic in so far as *enforced* images of space determine the relationships that people groups can make with the land and its life sustaining flora and fauna. The benefit of Woods' approach is his attention to the differences amongst the indigenous Mississippians; European Settler; African American enslaved; and Planter imaginations of the Delta Region.¹¹¹ Woods' critical geography will assist in setting a basis from which to consider the theological implications implicit in the blues people's epistemology. Woods' work recognizes the ways in which the mobilization of the Mississippi Plan of Development imposes twelve successive and distinct mobilizations of plantation ideology, politics, and

¹¹⁰ Woods, *Development Arrested : The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta*, 40.

¹¹¹ For an overview of the indigenous Mississippians, blues people, and planter outlook on the Delta Region see: *ibid.*, Chapter 3.

economic organization that kept the corporation of planters in primary and, in some cases, total control of the Delta. Woods refers to the planters' plans for the development of the Delta as the Plantation Regime or the plantation bloc of power. For clarities sake, I will keep with Woods' terms. The twelve mobilizations of the Plantation Regime include:

1. The Trail of Tears (Expulsion of the Native American's from the Delta Region)
2. Implementation of capitalist slavery
3. Succession from the Union and the rise in the level of cotton production
4. Systematic Deconstruction of Black land based Autonomy
5. Presidential Reconstruction (1861-1864)
6. Radical Reconstruction and Black Male Suffrage (1866-1865)
7. Shotgun Policy –violent and terroristic reversal of black male suffrage (1875)
8. Constitutional Disenfranchisement of Black male suffrage
9. Violent and terroristic demobilization of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union
10. Rise of anti –organized Labor Councils and Organizations
11. Planter councils dismantle the poor people's campaign and voter registration
12. Emergence of the Lower Mississippi Development Commission¹¹²

The following treatment is in no way exhaustive, and the reader should note that the twelve mobilizations are histories within themselves. Nevertheless, in what follows, the effort is to give an overview from which to understand the spatial implications of the Plantation Regime and how it reflects what we have described more broadly as the coloniality of power.

Woods' work is careful to remind that any talk of the blues must first recognize the occupation and genocide of indigenous peoples and their lands. It is

¹¹² Woods enumerates these mobilizations in the subheadings of each chapter beginning in Chapter 3. Ibid.

this deep loss of life, which characterizes the depths of the wound left behind by colonization. This deep loss is not only physical but cosmological and epistemological. Victimized by genocide and forced removal from their homelands, the indigenous also endure injury to their *imaginations* of home and their life ways that reflect their cosmovision. It is in this colonial wound that the blues people find themselves. As Woods describes, the death and exile of the indigenous peoples of the Delta Region brought with it the death of their socio-spatial imagination. To this point he writes:

The Chickasaw, the Cherokee, and the Choctaw... soon found themselves surrounded by people who saw their sacred forests, their burial places, and their ceremonial and hunting grounds as vacant and unused commodities. There was little appreciation for the Native American land stewardship practices that had maintained both ecological abundance and social diversity. The settler world view saw the ecosystem in all its biodiversity as isolable and exploitable parts: Forests became timber, deer became fur, water became irrigation, and people became slaves.¹¹³

This transition was brought about by the colonial imagination that reduced the indigenous peoples of the Delta into objects that stood in the way of agricultural capital. The violent take over and occupation of the lands of the Crie, Choctaw, Tunica, Yamasee, Appalache and other pre-colonial ethnicities, ended the former inter-ethnic relationships amongst Amerindians that extended from Guatemala to Wisconsin. It is important to note that before the European invasion, the Native American agricultural system, based mainly on the production of corn, had already made trade routes in which the peoples of the Delta, the Yazoo, the Tunica, and the Natchez, were an integral part. In this milieu, the peoples living along the Mississippi

¹¹³ Ibid., 43.

River were connected to the Mayan and Aztec cultural spheres through trade. Also, indigenous peoples were already moving towards a conceptualization of the American landscape that transcended specific ethnic interpretations of space. Still, the commodification of the Delta Region under the modern imagination deconstructed this Native American epistemology and gnosis which imaged the lands of the Delta Region as a subject.¹¹⁴

The next steps in the Mississippi plan, mobilizations 2 and 3, were enslavement and the rise of the southern capitalist economy. Woods contends that economic historiographers of the South often misinterpret the relationship between modern capitalism and slave labor. According to Woods, this oversight is due to several missteps in the interpretation of the power of the planters. Central to this misinterpretation is the assumption that the South and the Delta region lagged behind the modern move towards capitalism in the Northern states. Woods argues that this view of the South is more prescriptive than descriptive. In particular, Woods notes a bias in this interpretation of history that privileges an urban understanding of trade. According to Woods, readers of the southern economy often mistakenly see it as a dying feudalism rather than a bastion of capitalism. Following Marx's interpretation of chattel slavery, Woods contends that the plantation system represented a technology that was on par with the machine based capitalism of the factories typically associated with the industrial revolution of Northern States.

¹¹⁴ Vine Deloria and George Tinker have dedicated the majority of their work to the religious and theological implications of this destructive moment in American history. I will briefly return to the insights of their work later. For now, suffice it to say that the rising need for capital in U.S. was the impetus that led to the degradation and almost extinction of the indigenous ways of knowing the lands of the Americas. See: Deloria, *God Is Red : A Native View of Religion*. See also Tinker, *Missionary Conquest : The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide*.

Understanding the enslaved as a labor force (technology) rather than private property is integral to Woods' interpretation of the socio-spatial understanding of the South as a planter led form of rural capitalism. To this point Woods writes:

They [the enslaved] were subsistence wage workers, and the largest section of the US working class...A closer examination of the rise of capitalist slavery in the South reveals not a static, decaying system of production, but one that was constantly restructured to meet new demands generated by global competition and by ethnic and labor conflicts.¹¹⁵

From this perspective, the perceived inherent otherness attributed to the enslaved through racist propaganda and religious ideology can be perceived as a means to implement unity amongst white yeoman farmers, the small land owner, and the entirety of the white population. By leveraging white unity, the planters maintained the disenfranchisement of the African American labor force. Mobilizations 2 and 3 marks the rise of capitalist slavery and the ideal of autonomy amongst planter dominated southern states. These mobilizations take shape between the years of 1837-1861. Documents from this period describe the rich soils of the Delta Region as an endless resource for producing a profit.¹¹⁶ The seemingly endless fertility of the Delta soils was shaped and reshaped through the development of mechanization, gang labor, crop diversification practices, soil conservation, and slave breeding practices. These development projects worked to enforce the colonial ideology of land domination in two significant ways. On one hand, it

¹¹⁵ Woods, *Development Arrested : The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta*, 46.

¹¹⁶ Southern Alluvial Land Association., *The Call of the Alluvial Empire : Containing Authentic Information About the Alluvial Region of the Lower Mississippi Valley, Particularly the States of Arkansas, Tennessee, Mississippi and Louisiana* (Memphis: Southern Alluvial Land Association, 1919).

revealed that the U.S. economy could secure itself globally if it could maintain power over the flora and fauna, now resources and commodities, of the Americas (especially in the Delta Region). On the other hand, the development of the Delta lands provided planters, living in the South, an opportunity to affirm their autonomy from Northern political and economic interests. In this milieu, the Civil War emerges not only as a conflict over the system of enslavement, but also over the control of the resources and the capital gains of the Delta Region. This point becomes clear in the mobilizations that follow the Civil War.

Mobilizations 2 and 3 re-worked the Delta Region into a system of levees and plantations surrounded by drainage systems that had to be constantly fortified and re-engineered. These projects took an enormous toll on the physical environment of the Delta Region (discussed below) as well as the bodies of the enslaved. The gang labor system was most crippling in this regard. Gang labor, introduced as a means of increasing efficiency, required all slaves to work on the same project at once. For instance, when it was time to plow, all of the enslaved plowed. When it was time to harvest, the entire enslaved population of a plantation harvested. Planters in the Delta Region, in particular, had a significant advantage in the adoption of the gang labor system as the Delta region had the highest enslaved population. By 1860, the end of the period of the second and third mobilizations of the Plantation Regime, over 72 percent of the Delta population was composed of enslaved laborers.¹¹⁷ With these numbers, planters in the Delta Region could continue to produce profits even after the official end of the trans-Atlantic trade in 1808 which lead to a significant

¹¹⁷ Woods, *Development Arrested : The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta*, 47.

decrease in the trafficking of Africans, although it did not stop. By harnessing the reproductive potential of the enslaved, the planters had successfully moved, as Karl Marx argued, from producing surplus *products* to surplus *labor*. Enslaved black bodies had now become, at least in the Marxian outlook, pure commodity.

However, this Marxian outlook on the bodies of the enslaved was not total. The Plantation Regime mobilizations had to *force* African peoples and their descendants into the colonial assemblages of space and political-economy such that the capitalist vision could operate. Arguably, no other time in the modern/colonial history of the Americas proved this point to be true than the period that extends the end of the Civil War and the Reconstruction Period. Gains made in land “improvement” before this time included a massive 142 mile long levee project which had increased the projected value of the forested Delta lands by some 150 million dollars.¹¹⁸ Woods reports that the levee project increased the estimated value of the Delta lands from 7.7 million in 1853 to 23.4 million in 1857.¹¹⁹ During the Civil War Union Troops (both black and white) confiscated these lands. The loss of these extremely valuable soils greatly threatened the southern planters and their regime of power. Further, the fact that former slaves protected the confiscated plantations, dissolved the spatial order, albeit momentarily, that maintained the ideal of white supremacy. With the enslaved no longer confined to the properties of their owners, the ideal of white supremacy was no longer able to enforce itself.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 59.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

At the latter part of the Civil War, the confiscated lands were deeded over, promised, or occupied by escaped slaves and black Union soldiers. In this scenario, free blacks, which in some instances outnumbered their former enslavers by 100's of thousands were not only backed by the support of Union Troops, but in their hope that they would be able to actualize a sustainable livelihood on the lands that once were the spaces of their enslavement. These settlements, populated by armed black troops and the formerly enslaved, were first known as "contraband camps." With cooperation from northern supporters of free labor, many of the "contraband camps" developed into sustainable townships which posed a great threat to the planter regime which was dependent on unfranchised black labor. Woods' description of the contraband camps and townships of the Lower Mississippi Valley is telling of the potential that the formerly enslaved possessed:

In the Lower Mississippi Valley of 1864, there were around 124,000 free African Americans: 41,000 served as soldiers or army laborers; 72,500 worked either on [confiscated] plantations or in the wood yards, cities, and freedmen villages; and 10,000 were being directly assisted by the government...If these workers had been given the confiscated lands a new type of democracy could have emerged in the Delta. Instead, the federal government chose to take advantage of historically high cotton prices to revitalize planter power and plantation capitalism.¹²⁰

Despite the work that formerly enslaved black Americans did to show their vision of autonomy in the Delta landscape, it was ultimately the planters representation of the Delta region as an Alluvial Empire¹²¹ that won out. Coupled

¹²⁰ Ibid., 63.

¹²¹ Alluvial Empire was the term often used in advertisement literature and survey literature aimed at selling the rich alluvial soils of the Delta Region that were covered over with swamp lands and forests. "Alluvial Empire" played on a type of popular nostalgia of Mediterranean, Mesopotamian and Egyptian Empires that rose to power by harnessing the fertility of the alluvial soils. "Alluvial soil" describes soils formed from the sediment left behind from overflowed rivers or drained swamps and

with the rise of global cotton prices that influenced northern political and economic interests to support the southern planters, the reestablishment of the plantation hegemony over the black labor force did not remain inactive for long.¹²² With slavery abolished, the planters' key to dominating the formerly enslaved labor force was an all-out assault on the blues epistemology and its potential to produce visions of autonomy and self-determination amongst black Americans.

The Plantation Regime from the time of Reconstruction used every power imaginable to ensure that the assault on black American autonomy was both effective and constant. This assault included the exclusion of blacks from the system of private property and suffrage. The assault was both legal and terroristic. The emergence of lynch mobs, Black Codes, and Jim Crow laws in the southern states are reflections of how legality, backed by violence, operated as a deterrent to black

marshes. While the term does not show up in the historical records of the Delta until 1919 the use of the term in reference to flood plain soils dates back to the 17th century. For more on the use of "Alluvial Empire" in advertisements and survey writings see: Southern Alluvial Land Association, *The Call of the Alluvial Empire : Containing Authentic Information About the Alluvial Region of the Lower Mississippi Valley, Particularly the States of Arkansas, Tennessee, Mississippi and Louisiana*.

¹²² Ironically, some economic historians argue that this is ultimately what leads to the impoverished conditions that still plague the Delta Region today. In particular they point to the lack of economic diversification in the local markets of the Delta region and an over dependency on global market prices for cotton or other cash crops as the sources of economic degradation in the MS Delta. In addition, they argue that despite the cooperation amongst planters, plantations where largely family owned ventures that where concerned with familial well-being rather than participation in local economic growth. It is important to note that the idea of the plantation economy connects the U.S. South to many plantation economies around the world. Extending the idea beyond the spatial imagery of the nation state is crucial for furthering decolonial thought. While it cannot be addressed in full, the decolonial economic assumption in this work is that the U.S. South should be seen as a pocket of conditions that are similar to the so called Third World Countries. For more on this see: Joseph P. Reidy, *From Slavery to Agrarian Capitalism in the Cotton Plantation South : Central Georgia, 1800-1880, The Fred W Morrison Series in Southern Studies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992). For world perspectives on the idea of plantation economies and underdevelopment see: George L. Beckford, *Persistent Poverty; Underdevelopment in Plantation Economies of the Third World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Lloyd Best and Kari Levitt, *Essays on the Theory of Plantation Economy : A Historical and Institutional Approach to Caribbean Economic Development* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of West Indies Press, 2009).

autonomy and free organized labor. Against these odds, the enslaved and the formerly enslaved black Americans still dared to understand themselves as the primary source from which their freedom would be gained, achieved, and maintained.¹²³ With this in mind, their anxiety about their identity was held in terrible tension with the struggle for autonomy¹²⁴ from the Plantation Regime and

¹²³ Woods, drawing on Richard Wright's interpretation of the aesthetics of the black working class, uses the term blues epistemology to refer to the knowledge behind the hope for self-determined development among black Americans during the Reconstruction period and the organization of the Freedman's Bureau. "Blues epistemology" signifies the shift in focus away from the ideology of the plantation and the black American Christian notions of engagement with the Delta Region. Woods affirms what he means by "blues epistemology" with these words:

From the unique experience and position of the enslaved Black Southern working class there emerged a self-referential classificatory grid. This distinct and evolving complex of social explanation and social action, this praxis, provided support for the myriad traditions of resistance, affirmation and confirmation that were to follow. This pillar of African American identity is referred to in this work as the blues epistemology.

Here, Woods employs a class distinction, following Wright's analysis of the black working class aesthetic, as a means to distinguish the blues as a self-referential phenomenon within black American culture. Historical support for his claim is seen in the organizations built by black Americans with white American tenant farmers. The Wobblies movement, The Southern Farmers Alliance; The Colored Farmers Alliance; the building of black townships in Tulsa, Oklahoma and Mound Bayou, Mississippi; and the rise of community rifle clubs organized to prevent lynchings and white terror; are representative of the blues epistemology at work. For more on the history of these movements see: Woods, *Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta*, 29, 103-20. Also see: Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration*; Steven Hahn, *The Political Worlds of Slavery and Freedom, The Nathan I Huggins Lectures* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009); Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeomen Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983). For Richard Wright's theory on the blues aesthetic see: Richard Wright, "Blueprint for Negro Literature," in *The Black Aesthetic*, ed. Jr. Addison Gayle (Garden City: Double Day, 1971). For a more sociological study see: Edward Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie*, (New York,: Collier Books, 1962).

¹²⁴ The idea of autonomy, the ability of people to determine and enact their own livelihood, is an idea that has had a somewhat ambiguous relationship to the ideal of freedom in American political thought. The leaders of the American Revolutionary War and the architects of the U.S. government that followed it had, at best, a limited conception of autonomy which was primarily conceived in relation to British Imperialism and its power to determine the life of those male colonists living in lands of the Americas. Later, enslaved Africans, abolitionists, feminist, civil rights activists, black nationalists and others through uprisings, revolts, political organizations and other methods, extended and/or reshaped the Anglo-Saxon male centered reality and conception of autonomy and its relationship to freedom. Political historians and philosophers have noted that the coexistence of slavery and freedom, amongst the 13 colonies was a peculiar relationship. Rather than seeing freedom and enslavement as a universal contradiction in terms, some historians have argued for a more critical assessment of freedom that recognizes the forms of freedom that would find slavery permissible. For more on this idea see: Francois Furstenberg, "Beyond Freedom and Slavery: Autonomy Virtue and Resistance in Early American Political Discourse," *Journal of American History*

the colonial vision for life. Woods' insight into this reality is that he sees the long duration of the desire for autonomy within the historical record of enslavement, Emancipation, Reconstruction and the post-Reconstruction period.

Had black land based autonomy been sustainable at any one of these periods, the formerly enslaved would have assumed a level of self-determination that would have at least weakened the power of the Plantation Regime over the Delta Lands. However, the idea of land based autonomy was constantly suppressed, and the Plantation Regime ensconced all efforts for self-determination within a forced context of alterity. Mobilizations 4, 7, and 9 of the Mississippi Plan speak to this suppression. At the end of the Civil War, former Confederate soldiers, funded by southern planters, galvanized militias and lynch mobs to prevent suffrage and land ownership by black Americans. In the eyes of the planters, black suffrage and land based autonomy would amount to retrogression from the ground gained by the previous mobilizations which expelled the indigenous image of the Delta, and enforced the enslavement of Africans. Armed with colonial and religious outlooks of dominion, planters worked to secure their plan of domination by injecting the

89, no. 4 (2003). Furstenberg's work essays the relationship between freedom and slavery and how the negative definition of "freedom" and "liberty" in early British American political thought were taken to mean *not a slave* and the absence of coercion, respectively. As such, these terms employ a dependency on the condition of slavery as a condition to image the condition of being "free" or existing in a state of "liberty." Furstenberg's analysis of the relationship between freedom and slavery, helps to clarify the historical dynamics of what is understood here as the global design of modernity that extends beyond the local history of Britain and determines through ideological coercion, domination, enslavement, and violence the conditions of the enslaved, Native Americans and Amerindians. With Furstenberg in mind, we can see that those who existed beyond the boundary of European humanity were not deemed fit for liberty and freedom. Rather, they were the means by which it was to be achieved. We have referred to these conditions above as the "forced context." For more on the relationship of freedom, autonomy, and slavery in American history see: Du Bois, *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America 1638-1870*; David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975).

colonial outlook into southern literature, religion, and other cultural institutions. For Woods, the blues epistemology develops out of the long duration of carving out life in negotiation with this re-inscription of the Plantation Regime. While the enslaved and formerly enslaved did not codify their economic outlook into written theories, their organizational and insurrectional involvements have produced a text which reveals their critical understanding of their power to disrupt the planters and their socio-spatial constructions of the Delta Region.

The entirety of the Mississippi Delta Plan of Development and its history is too vast to take up inside of this dissertation. However, the main thrust alluded to in the summary above is to show that the enslaved and their “free” descendants, despite their insights about their relative power, were up against an enormous system which was empowered by socially sanctioned and legally sanctioned racial violence. This violence, perpetuated to secure the colonial imagination of space, was integral to the Mississippi Plan of Development. The insurgency of the enslaved and formerly enslaved, the focus of chapters three and four, amid these conditions is remarkable and telling of a different imagination of the Delta lands. However, we cannot move to this discussion without attention to the land itself. Wounded by the colonial image of space and its enforcement, the land and its flora and fauna suffered immensely. Such a wound is better charted via the discipline of environmental history.

The Space of the Delta as Environment: Reading the Delta with Critical Environmental History

As stated before, the Mississippi Plan of Development decentered the indigenous view of the Delta Region that saw the flora and fauna of the Delta as a subject rather than an exploitable resource. As the image of the Delta environment shifted from subject to resource/commodity, the physical make up changed in ways that were unprecedented before the arrival of European settlers. Much of this had to do with two major economic interests, cotton and timber. Environmental historian Mikko Saikku charts the effects of these and other agricultural industries in his text, *This Delta This Land* (what follows draws heavily from his research). The international trade of Delta commodities was the cause of an irreversible human imposition on the space of the Delta. The planting and harvesting via the capitalist means of production included enslavement, the crop sharing lien system, free wage labor, and the work of incarcerated persons or penal labor.

Saikku interprets these human interventions into the Delta Region via French historian Fernand Braudel's idea of the *histoire de la longue durée*.¹²⁵ Applying this idea to the environment, Saikku argues that readings of the Delta Region should begin with the Holocene¹²⁶ period (12,000 to 15,000 years ago before the Paleolithic Ice Age) in which the Delta region was a natural formation. Environmentalists have distinguished the Delta Region's "natural" formation as a bottomland hardwood

¹²⁵ Fernand Braudel, *On History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), vii.

¹²⁶ "Holocene" refers to the period of time that begins at the close of the Paleolithic Ice age (12,000 to 11,500 years ago) and continues through the present. The Native-American and Euro-American histories make up the late Holocene period. Saikku, *This Delta, This Land : An Environmental History of the Yazoo-Mississippi Floodplain*, 54.

forest. For the environmentalist, natural signifies the moment before human interaction and is focused on the livelihood of the flora and fauna native to the bottomland forest and its resiliency compared to human impositions. This outlook is helpful as a means of accounting for the erasure of the life of the forest that is an integral part of the colonial wound. Before 3000 B.C., what is known today as the Delta Region was a true wilderness—an ecosystem uninhabited by humanity. After 3000 B.C., Saikku distinguishes two ecohistorical periods that make up the late Holocene period of the Delta bottomland hardwood forest: the Native American and the Euro-American.¹²⁷ By reviewing history in light of the eco-historical developments— that is those developments charted via indicators in the flora and fauna of the Delta Region— Saikku offers a view of the lands of the Delta Region and the changes they undergo as a result of the indigenous and Euro-American ethno-histories.

Saikku divides the indigenous period into three passages of time: the pre-Mississippian, the Mississippian, and the post-Mississippian. The pre-Mississippian period refers to the early societies of Native Americans living in the Delta Forest; the Mississippian period refers to the dense societal make up of indigenous Mississippian's which used agricultural advancements for survival; the post Mississippian period refers to the brief period of subsistence farming amongst colonial settlers and the emergence of the agricultural landscape that makes up the current spatial arrangement of the Delta. Saikku's study accounts for the following indicators in the ecohistory of Mississippi:

¹²⁷ Ibid., 247.

Human Population Dynamics
Society
Human View of Nature
Natural world in Human Thought
Space
Mode of Production
Primary uses of the floodplain (Yazoo-Mississippi)
Main form of Labor
Bounty of the Forest for Local Use
Bounty of Forest for Supralocal Use
Landscape
Forest condition
Flood Plain Hydrology¹²⁸

Charting these 13 indicators from 3000 B.C. to the present, Saikku accounts for the tension between the reproduction of biological and sociological systems and how they impact the Delta bottomland forest across time. His term, “ecohistory,” signifies a history that reflects on the relationship amongst humanity, flora, and fauna. With this in mind, the Delta bottomland forest is understood as a natural landscape that becomes a subject in the telling of history. Methodologically, this speaks to the task of this work in decolonial theological thought to “delink” from epistemologies that objectify the natural world and its processes seeing them only as a means of maintaining human social systems. To this end, the inclusion of Saikku’s insight gives us the second component of the colonial wound, the domination of the land. Let us turn our attention to the wound suffered by the Delta Hardwood Forest.

To be clear, the human imposition on the Delta Hardwood Forest begins with the arrival of the Mississippian peoples into the Delta Region. While it is difficult to interpret the impact of Mississippian peoples on the Delta Forest, early settler

¹²⁸ Ibid., 249-52.

history and archeology from the pre-Mississippian and Mississippian eras suggest that peoples living along the river transitioned from hunter gatherer small kinship based communities to a larger agricultural network with forms of tribute, slavery, and communal systems. Nevertheless, within Mississippian life-ways, the people maintained the health and wellbeing of the Delta Forest as a subject rather than an object. While the Delta Forest underwent impact during pre-Mississippian and post-Mississippian periods, this impact did not over determine the landscape. As Saikku reports, after the agricultural period in Mississippian ecohistory, the Delta Forest recovered and reforested the lands that the Mississippian peoples had cleared for agriculture. Much of this reforestation occurs during the period of the American Fur Trade during which the Delta Forest ecosystem suffered the loss of the deer which was almost hunted into extinction.

Significant in Saikku's study is his ability to give a general numerical account of the transition of the Delta region from a hardwood forest to an agricultural landscape. Using the environmentalist writings of William Faulkner as his muse, he shows that the vast difference between the European settler's outlook on the forest as a wilderness and the Mississippian cosmovision. More could be said here about the tension between Faulkner's modern environmentalist outlook and how this compares to the Mississippian cosmovision that sees nature as a subject, a *being* in a relationship. Suffice it to say for now that there is a peculiar bias in Saikku's use of Faulkner that mutes the Mississippian cosmovision relegating it to a fact of history rather than a muse for his writing. This point withstanding, Saikku reveals that the Delta Forest made up the dominant landscape of the Delta region under

Mississippian agriculture. Moreover, the Mississippian method of agriculture did not severely limit the ability of the forest to repopulate the spaces cleared for the growing of maize.

Saikku holds that the Delta Forest was fairly resistant to human induced change via Mississippian agriculture and for the large part, Euro-American agriculture. When the alluvial soils of the Delta were left abandoned, the Delta Forest took advantage and worked its way back into the patches of the agricultural landscape. After the Mississippian agricultural period, reforestation of the abandoned Mississippian agricultural fields only took roughly 120 years. The measure of the effects of the indigenous imposition on the environment is related to the speed at which the reforestation of agricultural lands took place. Under this measure, the speed of reforestation following agricultural imposition indicates the degree to which the system of agriculture impacted the Delta Forest. Reforestation of the Delta, after the forced migration and death of many of the Mississippians, occurred fairly rapidly. The speed of this reforestation speaks to the Mississippians and their cosmovision which maintained a reciprocal relationship with the Delta forest across hunter gather and agricultural periods.

As Saikku notes, human induced change in natural environments is not always considered as an indicator of environmental degradation. Rather, environmental degradation has to do with the resilience of an ecosystem during and after human induced changes on the environment. While there is a level of reforestation during the Euro-American period that follows the Civil War and a repopulation of deer populations after the stress of the fur trade, several species did not recover as a

result of the clearing of the Delta forests for European agriculture. The ivory billed woodpecker, Carolina parakeet, black bear and cougar, *subjects* in the Native American cosmovision, were all essentially driven out of the Delta Forest. The disappearances of these species from the Delta Forest are an example of the severity of the environmental impact of Euro-American societies in comparison to the Mississippian inhabitants of the Delta Forest. Over the course of the Euro-American ecohistory, the Delta forest suffered from a massive agricultural occupation. More and more, the global economy, rather than the well-being of the Forest, began to determine the makeup of the environment. Under what some historiographers have labeled a “second slavery”¹²⁹, the Delta Forest was drained, plowed, burned, and cleared into submission. By the third decade of the 20th century, the Delta Region alone was producing over half of the world’s cotton. It is estimated that the “improved land” or cultivated acreage of the Delta increased from 127,189 acres in 1850 to 1,816,725 acres in 1930.¹³⁰ None of this would have been possible without

¹²⁹ The second slavery describes the change from colonial enslavement to modern enslavement which develops as the underside of Industrial Revolution. Traditionally, Southern historians have viewed slavery as a colonial antebellum phenomenon that declines with the rise of Industrial Revolution in the Northern States. However, historians that have embraced a spatial-temporal view of history have described slavery as phenomena of “the Atlantic World.” The Atlantic world represents the relationships amongst the colonies of the Americas and the local markets of Europe and the U.S. Historians of the Atlantic World understand the history of enslavement as a trans-national spatial-temporal unit that culminates in 1888 with the abolishment of slavery in Brazil. The main difference in the historiographical outlook of Atlantic World historians is their attention to how enslavement as phenomenon works by relocation and redeployment rather than by a decisive end via the birth of the Industrial Revolution and the end of the Civil War. From this perspective, 1888 rather than 1865 is a greater signifier of the end of enslavement in the Americas. The rise of the export of cotton in the Delta region and the efforts of planters to maintain power over the Delta soils and cheap labor via sharecropping and debt lien systems are significant components of the “second slavery.” For more on “the second slavery” see: Anthony E. Kaye, “The Second Slavery: Modernity in the Nineteenth-Century South and the Atlantic World,” *The Journal of Southern History* 75, no. 3 (2009): 627, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/27779029>. See also: Dale Tomich and Michael Zeuske, “Introduction, the Second Slavery: Mass Slavery, World-Economy, and Comparative Microhistories,” *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 31, no. 2 (2008), <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/40241709>.

¹³⁰ Saikku, *This Delta, This Land : An Environmental History of the Yazoo-Mississippi Floodplain*, 136.

a major imposition on the Mississippi River and its hydrological processes. The overflow lands of the river, prior to human imposition and during the Mississippian eohistory, included *swamps* (forests covered by river waters for most of the year), *battures* (those lands located along the banks of the river), and bottoms or bottomlands (forests that remain dry for most of the year unless there is significant flooding). Taming the unpredictable hydrological processes that make up swamps, battures, and bottoms were key to the establishment of the “capitalist ecological revolution.” The labor force drained swamps, leveed battures, and cleared the forests of the bottom lands. The emergence of the Holocene period in the Delta placed the settlers at a disadvantage in achieving these so called “improvements” on the Delta Forest and its natural hydrological processes.

The frequency of flooding across the 18th, 19th, and early 20th century was in large part due to an increase in its water levels resultant from melting glaciers at the end of the Little Ice Age in the Paleolithic period. The Little Ice Age resulted in the Mississippi River receiving more than its previous receipt of water from northern sources. The early colonial settlers encounter this stage in the life of the Mississippi River— its waters were high and constantly overflowed its banks. When the river overflowed into the bottomlands of the Delta, it would leave behind its silt. The silt, rich in natural minerals and nutrients, formed the basis for the complex ecosystem of the Delta Forests. The Delta soils had undergone centuries of this process which made the fertility of the region’s topsoil perfect for sustaining the fauna and flora of the Delta Forest. In addition to the MS River’s contribution to the fertility of the soil, there is also the prehistoric mineral contribution. Before the Holocene period, the

lands that makes up the southeast of North America were covered by ocean waters. As these waters receded due to shifts in the makeup of the earth's continents, they left behind a unique layer of limestone, made up from remains of ocean organisms. These natural processes add to the richness of the Delta's soils and its subsequent marketability as a prime space for Euro-agricultural interests.

However, the harvest of history's gift of fertility came at a staggering price. After the discovery of the fertility of the Delta soils, planters found quickly that the maintenance of agricultural life required that they restrict the overflow processes of the MS River.

The Euro-American ecohistory of the Delta Region was an ongoing struggle with the "wild" rivers and waterways of the Delta region. The earliest record of colonial "improvement" on the river was in 1718 when Vitrac de Latour, an engineer under the French colonial rule of Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville, was forced to build the first augmentation of the Delta "hydraulic system."¹³¹ Vitrac de Latour warned Bienville that building the levee around New Orleans, Louisiana would

¹³¹ For more on the history of societies built around hydraulic systems see: Karl August Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism; a Comparative Study of Total Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 152-53. Wittfogel's argument is significant in the study of world history as it concerns the ability to dominate human groups by centralizing and monopolizing the available water sources. His "hydraulic hypothesis," argues that the centralization of the water supply can easily lead to despotic empires that have little hope from being overrun from the inside. Their only hope for a different life, he argued, was to create allies from the outside in order to decentralize the water supply. Many theorists have disagreed with what they see as a crude historical outlook working in Wittfogel's interpretation of "Oriental" empires, and other societies with centralized water supplies. Nevertheless, he is important here in the discussion of the "Delta Plan of Development" that essentially centralized all the waterways of the Delta as planters and merchants harnessed technologies that allowed them to dominate and rule over small farmers. For more on the debate over the hydraulic hypothesis see: Marcel van der Linden, *Western Marxism and the Soviet Union : A Survey of Critical Theories and Debates since 1917, Historical Materialism Book Series*, (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 171.

eventually lead to problems with flooding.¹³² However, Jean Baptiste ignored this warning, which has impacted flood patterns in southern Louisiana to this day. Under the guidance of de Latour, levees were built upon the natural bend of the river that gives New Orleans its crescent shape. Levee production in the Delta Region became of interest as the notes of surveyors on the soils of the Delta Region became the basis for promoting sales of the Delta lands. The beginnings of the so called “Alluvial Empire” rested on protecting substantial crop yields from the constant threat of flooding that was often no match for the human made levees.

The French example of levee production along the river was followed up by local and federal involvement of British Americans after the Louisiana Purchase. Levee production increased between 1835 and 1930 as planters lobbied for federally backed protection from flooding. Under the Swamp Land Act of 1849 and 1850, the federal government granted the swamp and overflowed lands to the states of Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi.¹³³ The Delta Region made up 4 million acres of this region. Fraud and the misappropriation of federal levee funds often led to inadequate levee production which did not prevent crop destruction during floods. Nevertheless, soil reports and the success of planters who had managed to make it through growing seasons without incident continued to make the Delta Region an object of interest. Along with the ongoing process of levees, there was the technological advancement of steamboats which made it possible to travel against the southerly currents of the Mississippi River. Steamboats added “value” to the

¹³² Saikku, *This Delta, This Land : An Environmental History of the Yazoo-Mississippi Floodplain*, 73.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 168.

farmlands of the Delta because they made it possible for farmers to sell their produce up river as well as down river. Steamboats led to another form of “improving” the river. In order that the steamboats could carry people and goods, the MS River had to be dredged. Dredging is a process of augmenting the depth of the river by deepening the river bed. Along with dredging, strategic locations of levees allowed engineers to reset the banks of the river which also added to its depth.

By leveraging the futures on the “improvement” of the land via levees, drainage systems, and dredging, local and state governments were able to enrich the coffers of the state by giving the illusion of endless agricultural profits. However, the Delta constantly challenged human efforts to improve the Delta Forest. The Mississippi River and other rivers in the Delta continued to flood resulting in the loss of life, crops, and property. Local efforts, which worked by county based systems of levee construction, were constantly faced with the woes of inadequate construction, levee failures, and flooding. After each major flood, U.S. Congress drew up bills and acts aimed at protecting the agricultural investments of planters and merchants. It is important to remember how the severity of these floods was measured by the loss of property and crops. Such a fiscal measurement serves as a further indicator of the transition from the Delta Forest landscape to the agricultural landscape.

Labor conditions under this massive effort to “tame” the river were some of the worst seen in the history of the United States. Death was such a constant factor in levee construction during enslavement that planters recruited Italian and Irish

workers so that they might protect their investments in human chattel.¹³⁴ The dangers associated with building levees and draining the lands was also the result of the Delta Forest resisting human imposition. Mosquitos and other insects carried diseases such as malaria that were easily transferable to those who spent extended amounts of time draining the land and building levees. At every turn, the lands of the Delta Region gave signs that it did not want to be “tamed” by the commodification practices of the planters. If it was not the mosquitos, it was the floods. If not the floods, there was the threat of the wild life—bears, panthers, and other animals reacting to the encroachment on their Forest.

The human imposition on the natural processes of the river resulted in the relocation of swamps, *battures*, and bottomlands. The relocation of these lands, Saikku argues, contributed to major floods in 1782, 1828, 1858, 1862, 1865, 1867, 1882, 1883, 1884, 1890, 1897, 1903, 1912, 1913, 1922, and 1927.¹³⁵ Of these floods, the 1927 flood was the largest. With an average depth of three feet, the 1927 flood waters covered the majority of the Delta Region’s farmable land. Saikku reports that the natural organization of the Delta waters was permanently augmented by 1940.¹³⁶ The flood of 1927 and other floods was substantially affected by the ways in which human interventions changed the natural overflow systems of the Mississippi. Before the Euro-American interventions, the MS River cut natural channels that connected it with the Tallahatchie-Yazoo watershed, Sunflower River, Deer Creek and Yazoo Rivers. Human interventions, culminating with the Flood

¹³⁴ Ibid., 147.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 141.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 251.

Control Act of 1936, shifted most of the natural watersheds, which housed the rivers overflow during excessive rainy periods. Also, the speed of the river was constantly changed by a combination of channeling and shortening practices which straightened the river by closing off the natural curves. As the flow of the river changed, lands that had once been forest and hunting grounds during the Mississippian periods were now covered by overflow. Literary author, William Faulkner, captures this in the words of one of his characters, Ike McCaslin, who comments on the completion of the Sardis water reservoir (one of the overflow areas created under the post-bellum land improvement projects culminating in 1940):

“...the Big Woods; the Big Bottom, the wilderness,” had “vanished now from where he had first known it; the very spot where him and Sam were standing when he heard his first running hounds and cocked gun and saw the first buck, was now thirty feet below the surface of a government built flood control reservoir whose bottom was rising gradually and inexorably each year on another layer of beer cans bottle tops and lost bass plugs.”¹³⁷

Faulkner’s scene scratches the surface of the loss experienced by the severe compromise of the Native American cosmologies. Mississippian peoples rarely saw the land as a *wild thing* to be harnessed, but as a subject to be respected and lived with in a relational way. The blues vision of the environment emerges in this loss that restricted the imagination of the land to the confines of the global market. Blues songs such as Memphis Minnie’s, “When the Levees Break” brings together how the

¹³⁷ Ibid., 164. This quote is taken from the close of Saikku Mikko’s chapter, “Taming the River” on the environmental history of the Mississippi River, the flood plains, and river systems of the Delta Region. I include it here to show how William Faulkner’s ecological writings chronicled the massive change which occurred to the landscape of the Delta Region. Stories such as Faulkner’s, along with the blues commentaries on life in the Delta, are representative of what has been referred to earlier as the deep sense of loss in blues music and blues epistemology.

workers processed their work in levee construction, and the emergent

“improvements” on the rivers and waterways:

If it keeps on rainin' levee's goin' to break.
If it keeps on rainin' levee's goin' to break.
Then the water gonna come in, and I'll have no place to stay.

Well all last night I sat on the levee and moan.
Well all last night I sat on the levee and moan.
Thinkin' 'bout my baby and my happy home.

If it keeps on rainin', levee's goin' to break.
If it keeps on rainin', levee's goin' to break.
And all these people have no place to stay...

Ah, cryin won't help you, prayin won't do no good.
Now cryin won't help you, prayin won't do no good.
When the levee breaks, mama, you got to move.

I worked on the levee mama both night and day
I worked on the levee mama both night and day
I worked so hard to keep the water away.

I had a woman she wouldn't do for me.
I had a woman she wouldn't do for me.
I'm gonna go back to my used to be.

That mean ole levee cause me to weep and moan.
That mean ole levee cause me to weep and moan.
Cause me to leave my happy home.¹³⁸

Minnie's' song, similar to Faulkner's expression, captures the loss that one feels dealing with the constancy of environmental change in the Delta. The floods, as discussed above, were a direct effect of the many human changes to the natural flow of the Mississippi River. As the agents (albeit coerced) of this change, the laborers

¹³⁸ Elizabeth West Marvin and Richard Hermann, *Concert Music, Rock, and Jazz since 1945 : Essays and Analytical Studies*, Eastman Studies in Music (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1995), 355.

often developed their ways of interpreting the “human made” eco-history of Euro-America. In this particular song, the levee was personified as a “mean” person that causes those who build it to “weep and moan.”

Moreover, the constancy of work, as will become more apparent in the following chapters, put great strain on the ability of workers to maintain love interests and families. Unlike the characters in Faulkner’s text, the levee workers were not removed romantic spectators of environmental change. They, like the Delta Forest, were being used as the means of reproducing Euro-American sociology that makes up a disastrous eco-history. Accordingly, their experience with loss was primarily fixated on the loss of their humanity, which occurred in the deadly labor conditions. Levee workers were the primary means by which the “Alluvial Empire” came into being. Irish immigrants, blacks, and poor whites were constantly working under the precarious conditions that made the Delta Region a rough space to inhabit, farm, and live. These conditions produced the forced and natural context for life in the Delta. The narratives of blues people speak back to these difficult realities in ways that can inform those looking to think beyond colonial ways of knowing and relating to the natural world.

As Memphis Minnie’s song suggests, the songs of the blues began to give thicker descriptions to the meaning of life that challenged the Judeo-Christian bifurcations of sacred and profane. While freedom movements during slavery and the Reconstruction suggested that faithfulness to the Judeo-Christian God would eventually lead them to a more fulfilled life in the Promised Land, it was clear that the Delta was no land of milk and honey. With the forces of the environment (both

natural and “improved”) and relentless economic interests in place, the struggle for autonomy in the Delta, despite the hopes inspired by the emancipation, was severely inhibited. The *weeps* and *moans* referred to in “When the Levee Breaks” and other songs posited that faithfulness to the ideal of freedom would require more than overcoming the temptations of the Devil. It would also require dealing with the *devilish* conditions that manifested themselves in the eco-history of Euro-Americans. The blues outlook on life emerged as a challenge to these forced conditions. In some instances, Afro-Christian orthodoxies, and black American politics exacerbated these forced conditions. In what follows, we will engage insights from decolonial theory that will assist in explicating the epistemological underpinnings of the blues outlook and how it relates to what Walter Mignolo has indicated as the colonial difference.

The Delta Region in Light of the Colonial Difference and Radical Historiography

Up until this point, we have allowed two expressions of the colonial wound to carry our discussion the geo-politics of the Mississippi Delta Plan and the Environmental History of the Delta Forest. Turning on the insights of these two contributions, our task now is to consider how decolonial theory assists us in mediating further the implications of the colonial wound and how the blues serves as a local community’s response. Unlike the Mississippi Plan and the ecohistory of the Mississippians, the blues option for life is one that comes of age in the transition to the Delta Region from a forest to an agricultural landscape. The means of production during the Euro-American agricultural period brings with it the shifts in

the means of production from enslaved labor to free wage based labor. In this massive transition, the image of the Delta Forest, as resource commodity, ensconced the enslaved in a dense system of suppression and oppression that offered little hope for autonomy. The insights of decolonial theory and the colonial difference help us to mediate the life altering effects of this system. It is to these insights that we now turn.

The Delta Space and the Colonial Difference

Mignolo's idea of the colonial difference is helpful in clarifying local histories about colonial imposition. For our purposes, the local history in question is the blues history that emerges amid the Mississippian and Euro-American histories. However, it is important to note that our use of the colonial difference is distinct from how Mignolo employs it in his work. The emphasis on critical geography and environmental history of the Delta is meant to situate the cultural production of the blues as a reflection of the "colonial difference." Critical geography and environmental history are distinct from Mignolo's deployment of "colonial difference" which mainly charts the genealogy of thought, choosing *scholars and intellectuals* as the representation of non-European epistemologies. While there is general agreement that Mignolo's colonial difference is helpful as an analytical tool, this section assumes that there needs to be a more rigorous treatment of cultural production to enhance the analysis of neglected epistemologies in the modern/colonial world. Particularly in the U.S., such a task requires a hermeneutic that resists, as best as possible, the external representations of black American culture that are products of another cultural production, the Western American

Academy. Space and the imagination of space(s) are employed here in an attempt to get closer to the articulation(s) of the colonial difference from the perspective of subjugated groups.

As set out in the first chapter, the foundational colonial difference refers to the set of differences (racial, gender, economic, and geo-political) asserted in the Americas, the Caribbean, Asia and Africa that depart from European centers of knowledge. Then, there is the colonial difference that refers to the experience of those subjugated by the foundational colonial difference. Mignolo's point in evoking the colonial difference is to bring attention to those that experience modernity as an imposition on their indigenous cultures and epistemologies rather than as local history. Rather than seeing indigenous peoples and the enslaved Africans as subjects and objects within modernity, Mignolo wants to bring attention to those epistemologies that approach modernity from its exteriority where other knowledges interpret the potential relationships between subjects and objects. To this point, Mignolo writes:

Colonial modernities, or subaltern modernities... expanding from the late fifteenth century to the current stage of globalization, has built a frame and a conception of knowledge based on the distinction between epistemology and hermeneutics and, by so doing has subalternized other kinds of knowledge... That long process of subalternization of knowledge is being radically transformed by new forms of knowledge in which what has been subalternized and considered interesting only as object of study becomes articulated as new loci of enunciation.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs : Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, 13.

By colonial and subaltern modernities, Mignolo indicates those conditions that European modernity produces as an exterior. Subaltern modernities are not, as we have discussed, a physical exterior but an imagined exterior or an imaged outside. For instance, Africa and the Americas are imagined, from within European modernity, as the exterior of rationality or a space where rationality does not exist. In terms of time, the cultures of Africa and the Americas are seen as stuck in the past or primitive. Such a distinction is not real, but discursively constructed as a means of explaining or “interpreting” the globe and its inhabitants.

The blues, I argue, emerges as an exterior at an intra-racial level which means that it suffers not only from the imposed exteriority of European Modernity but the exteriority imagined by black American intellectuals and Afro-Christian religion. Similar to the subalternized knowledges that Mignolo identifies, the blues, particularly in its musical forms, was seen as “an interesting object of study” rather than “a loci enunciation.” The reception of the blues by members of the Harlem Renaissance and their music recording company, Black Swan Records, is an example of this point. The founders of Black Swan Records had as their goal to project to the American audience at large a progressive image of black American culture. In regards to the blues, this meant finding representative blues singers that could fit into the aesthetic of progress.¹⁴⁰ The so called “progressive aesthetic” is distinguished by a capitulation to European standards of music, melody, harmony, pitch, tone, and rhythm. While this capitulation is not a full assimilation to European standards, it represents a type of mixing of insular black aesthetics with the

¹⁴⁰ Baraka, *Blues People : Negro Music in White America*, 128-29.

aesthetics of Euro-American modernity. Singers such as Bessie Smith whose style reflected the aesthetics of insular black life did not fit the aim of Black Swan records to “uplift” the race. After Bessie Smith’s audition for Black Swan Records, the members of the selection committee passed on signing Smith and decided instead to produce music with Ethel Waters whose sound more closely reflected European standards of musical style.¹⁴¹ Some members of the Harlem Renaissance, such as Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston, disagreed with the capitulation to European progressive standards of art and chose instead to embrace the “primitive aesthetics” and vernaculars of black folk culture.¹⁴²

Within this and similar processes, the epistemological underpinnings of blues music were subalternized at the hands of black political figures interested in “uplifting” the race. As black Americans began to participate in defining or redefining racial being, certain so called folk expressions of black life were subalternized in ways that mimicked European modernity and its racial imaginaries. The racial imagery produced by European epistemologies was used to distinguish the roles performed by persons of African descent, the indigenous peoples from the Andean and Native American world, the colonialists, and the eventual offspring born from the mixing of the races or “miscegenation.”¹⁴³ Amongst black Americans

¹⁴¹ Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism : Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*, 152.

¹⁴² Sharon L. Jones, *Rereading the Harlem Renaissance : Race, Class, and Gender in the Fiction of Jessie Fauset, Zora Neale Hurston, and Dorothy West*, Contributions in Afro-American and African Studies (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2002), 68,111.

¹⁴³ Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," in *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, in *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, ed. Mabel Moraña, Enrique D. Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 212-13.

however, as seen in the example of Black Swan Records, it was embraced as a means of deconstructing the racial “stereotype” of primitive being and affirming the ability of black Americans to participate in the world created primarily by Euro-American modernity. Mignolo’s use of scholar/intellectuals as representatives of subaltern knowledge often veils this point. A brief look at his treatment of W.E.B Du Bois, who, ironically, was one of the founding members of Black Swan Records, will help to clarify this further.

In his retrieval of Du Bois, Mignolo is especially focused on Du Bois’ idea of “double consciousness.” “Double-consciousness, Mignolo argues, is representative of the colonial modernity experienced by those racialized as black under Euro-American modernity. Mignolo’s use of Du Bois’ theory as representative of a black U.S. subaltern modernity ignores the debates that develop around Du Bois’ implicit and sometimes explicit elitism that are part and parcel of his attempt to “uplift” the black race. The history of Black Swan Records and its motto of being the “true race record,” that is the true representation of black music, reveals that Du Bois, even in his attempt to deconstruct the apartheid state, made use of the differencing hermeneutics of Europe. For instance, Du Bois adopted the white supremacist terminology, the “talented tenth,” as a signifier of the black intellectual vanguard who would lead black Americans in a cultural and political revolution towards autonomy.¹⁴⁴ While Du Bois abandons this term during the latter part of his life, his political thought never reconciled the conflict between the imposition of a vanguard ideology onto black culture, and those black ways of life that seemed unconcerned

¹⁴⁴ Du Bois, *Writings*, 842.

with the aims of “progress.” His works on education and the development of black Americans which stress intellectual development over cultural production reveal that his experience as a Harvard trained intellectual may have alienated him from the day to day experiences and struggles of black Americans living in the rural towns of the southeast.¹⁴⁵As such, his effort to develop or “uplift” them was sometimes seen as a patronizing imposition.¹⁴⁶

For the most part, it appears that Mignolo overlooks these complexities and how they might complicate his positive appropriation of Du Bois as a representative figure of his U.S. colonial difference. On the other hand, it could be argued that “double consciousness”¹⁴⁷ is not the most representative idea of thinking in light of the colonial difference. Another option might be Du Bois’ more historically rigorous work, such as his *Suppression of the African Slave Trade* or his references to the cultural production of the Negro Spirituals in the *Soul of Black Folks*. I will focus here on the *Suppression of the African Slave Trade*. In his writings on the African slave trade, Du Bois chronicles and interprets the meaning of the self-organizing efforts and potential of the enslaved to orchestrate successful uprisings and revolts.¹⁴⁸ If Mignolo’s effort is to decolonize epistemology by wresting it from the global design of racial stereotypes and Occidentalism, then it would seem that Du Bois’ appreciation for the self-organizing activities of the enslaved, and the epistemologies that undergird them would be more representative of the colonial

¹⁴⁵ Adolph L. Reed, *W.E.B. Du Bois and American Political Thought : Fabianism and the Color Line* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 124.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ W. E. B. Du Bois and Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Writings* (New York: The Library of America, 1986), 364-65.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 74-96.

difference. From this perspective, Du Bois' double consciousness might have been Du Bois' way of affirming retrogression in the self-organizing potential of the formerly enslaved during the Reconstruction.

With the above suggestion in mind, it can be argued that Mignolo's reading of "double consciousness" as a generic term used for all African and black Americans subjugated by racialization might not yet be the meaning intended by Du Bois.¹⁴⁹ As a result, it could be argued that Mignolo's work assumes the privileged space of power from which Du Bois saw black Americans and their local history. This privileged space becomes visible when intra-racial and geo-political dynamics are mapped across the late 19th and early 20th century. Moreover, the strength of Mignolo's theorization of the colonial difference and border thinking can be more widely appreciated when a greater attention to the complexities of how the geo-politics of knowledge operate at the intra-racial or intra-group levels. At the intra-racial level, the coloniality of power takes on new incarnations that also warrant critique and analysis. Recognizing Mignolo's limiting of the colonial difference to the

¹⁴⁹ Du Bois' work, *The Suppression of the Slave Trade*, includes examples of slave revolts which troubles Mignolo's representation of double consciousness as border thinking towards decoloniality. The sections of the *Suppression of the Slave Trade* that cover the Haitian Revolution and mutinies, such as the one performed on the Amistad cargo ship, reveal not the trepidation of double consciousness, a "dogged twoness" warring ideals of two worlds one black and one white, but a fairly directed activity towards freedom. As such, the anxiety of "double consciousness" was not a permanent condition, but one that could be overcome by direct action against the apartheid state. As a theory, double consciousness is not so easily, as Mignolo sees it, a decolonial thinking, but a way of thinking that transpires when the demands of decolonization are not met. Rather than seeing Du Bois' theory as representative of black American decolonial thought in the U.S., it would appear that Mignolo's theory would be better anchored by an attention to the space of production from which black Americans speak, rather than the professional intellectual space from which their supposed representatives, speak. For Du Bois' work on enslavement see: *ibid*. For a critical analysis of the appropriations of Du Bois see: Reed, *W.E.B. Du Bois and American Political Thought: Fabianism and the Color Line*, 91-93. I am in agreement with Reed's critique of the appropriations of Du Bois in black American scholarship that do not make adequate mention of the historical context of Du Bois' political thought. Because of this, they often understate how Du Bois' politics of uplifting black Americans employed a version of elitism.

genealogies of subaltern thought does not undermine the contribution that he is making to our discussion. The nuances above withstanding, there is still harmony between the blues articulation of an alternative life and the theoretical outlook suggested in Mignolo's "colonial difference."

However, Mignolo's contribution does not culminate with the analytical recognition of the colonial difference, additionally; Mignolo desires a way forward for subaltern knowledge. The way forward is described by Mignolo as "decoloniality." Decoloniality signifies the positive project of thinking from the new loci of enunciation. For our purposes, this new locus is the blues. Decoloniality, then, is a generative term used by Mignolo to identify an alternative to the problematics of coloniality. A brief treatment of decoloniality is also necessary as a means of situating what we will argue later as the blues alternative vision for life represented in the sonic, the land, and sensual modalities.

If we recall from our earlier discussion in Chapter one, "decoloniality" refers to phenomena that shift the geography of reason from Europe and the imagination of the Americas as "the West," to other loci of enunciation that begin their inquiry into modernity from their respective subaltern perspectives. While many of these loci are struggling with the imposition of Europe's expansion of its image of space, they manage to posit their working assumptions concerning humanity, reason, rationality, and place. In a recent article, cultural theorist Sylvia Wynter, drawing on Mignolo and others, explicates this by identifying the European construction of "Man" as part of the foundational structure of coloniality. To this point she writes,

The argument proposes that the struggle of our new millennium will be one between the ongoing imperative of securing the well-being of

our present ethnoclass (i.e., Western bourgeois) conception of the human, Man, which overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself, and that of securing the well-being, and therefore the full cognitive and behavioral autonomy of the human species itself/ourselves. Because of this *overrepresentation*, which is defined in the first part of the title as the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom, any attempt to unsettle the coloniality of power will call for the unsettling of this overrepresentation as the second and now purely secular form of what Aníbal Quijano identifies as the “Racism/ Ethnicism complex,” on whose basis the world of modernity was brought into existence from the fifteenth/sixteenth centuries onwards (Quijano 1999, 2000) and of what Walter Mignolo identifies as the foundational “colonial difference” on which the world of modernity was to institute itself.¹⁵⁰

Wynter’s emphasis on overrepresentation is especially significant because of how it distinguishes the object of decolonizing work. For Wynter, decolonizing work is about unsettling the coloniality of power that expresses itself in the “overrepresentation of man.” Overrepresentation gets at what Mignolo expresses with his terminology “global designs.” In general, global designs refers to the phenomenon of a local history— as we have seen with Euro-American ecohistory above— projecting and imposing its history onto other local histories. In Wynter’s argument, the idea that represents the global design is the idea of “Man.” However, it is not “Man” alone, but how “Man” is “overrepresented as if it were universally human itself.”¹⁵¹ With this, Wynter notes that humanity and the ideas associated with the interpretation of humanity should not be associated with “Man” in an *a priori* fashion. Rather, Wynter calls for a decolonial moment in which the subaltern subject abandons “Man” as the idea by which all humanity must be judged. In what we have set out above, “Man” signifies a humanity that relates to the Delta Forest in

¹⁵⁰ Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/ Freedom: Towards the Human, after Man, Its Overrepresentation-- an Argument,” 260.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

ways that subdued it into an agricultural landscape. Mignolo's vision for decoloniality enhances the effort to surpass "Man," the ethno-racial complex, coloniality, and the foundational colonial difference that determines "Man" and those things that are distinct from "Man."

Most significant for our purposes is Wynter's focus on the transition of "Man" from a theological idea to "Man" as a "purely" secular idea.¹⁵² This transition suggests that the "Man" of the Euro-American modern world, the secular "Man," is the "Man" that must be unsettled and eventually overcome. Such a move recognizes the transition to the modern "Man" that emerges in the Renaissance period and takes shape via the racial/ethnic complex as Europeans encounter new human beings that challenge their idea of themselves as "Man." In other words, Native American, African, and Amerindian forms of humanity represent Man's negation rather than Man's equal. As a theological project, this current work cannot assume, as Wynter and decolonialists at large, that the "overrepresentation" of the theological idea of Man has been overcome by the secular in a climactic way. From a theological perspective, the work of Franz J. Hinkelammert, who suggests that the problem of modernity is the problem of "idolatry," might be more instructive, albeit with a decolonial critique of his *imposed* cosmology (more on this later).¹⁵³ While Hinkelammert's "idolatry" still casts a theo-centric epistemology onto the Americas,

¹⁵² Mignolo mentions this, but he is not as explicit in his treatment as Wynter. I include her here to add a deeper clarity to what is meant by the colonial difference and how it assists in analyzing blues epistemology. Ibid., 260-61; Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity : Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, 82.

¹⁵³ Ulrich Duchrow, Franz J. Hinkelammert, and Catholic Institute for International Relations., *Property for People, Not for Profit : Alternatives to the Global Dictatorship of Capital* (London: Zed Books, 2004), 216.

it can be reworked in light of decolonial insights which have set their targets on secular coloniality rather than theological coloniality (more on this later as well). For now, suffice it to say that theological discourse does not have to express itself through theories of “overrepresentation” or coloniality. Rather, it can emerge as a way of thinking that is constitutive with the new loci of enunciation or subaltern knowledges. When theology learns from subaltern knowledges, it should not only look to contextualize or enculturate. Such affirmations are only possible as an extension of European modernity and its imposition on indigenous cultures. Doing theology decolonially requires doing theology *with* the epistemologies that produce alternatives to “Man” and its “overrepresentation.”

People groups that purpose and apply their respective alternatives, however, cannot romantically presume that decolonial ideas will prevail over the ever fluctuating global reality of coloniality. However, they *can* look forward to the reception of their alternatives as signs that the overrepresentation of Man does not have the only say concerning what is possible for humanity at large. Unearthing moments where human beings employ their autonomy to decenter Europe and its overrepresentation demands rigorous attention. The focus on space is helpful in this effort in so far as it allows one to look at how people use their imaged boundedness to a specified area to invent their space anew. In regards to the blues, this space is the Delta Region. It was here that two overrepresentations, Afro -Christianity and secularism, both operating at an intra-racial level, prompted the need for a blues response or another locus of enunciating. This locus will be the focus of the next chapter. For now, let us recap the ground we have covered thus far.

Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to situate the Delta Region within the larger history of the U.S. environment and the emergence of the coloniality of power in the Americas. These components reflect Gerald Boodoo's insights on the "forced context." To this point, he writes:

The so-called availability of choices is an illusion of self-determination, which is provided by, and is a concession from, the dominant political and cultural economy...[S]elf-determination merely replicates the ideology of dominant structure(s) and is legitimated by it. This... is constitutive of colonial structures. Those subject to the illusion of self-determination are thus really forced into a particular stance and are bereft of meaningful choices related to their condition of exploitation in the drive toward liberation. Having no real choices except what is handed out by the structures of exploitation clearly situates the forced individual in the position that freedom is therefore not dependent on will, and the so-called choices made by the will.¹⁵⁴

Boodoo's points give insight into the aim of this chapter. As Boodoo has indicated, those who endure the forced context of colonial domination are often "bereft of meaningful choices related to their condition of exploitation." Further, Boodoo argues that the so called options produced by "choices" are often illusions used by the dominant political economy to further the submission of those on the exterior of modernity to disrupt their projects for liberation. The effort here has been to situate the types of choices available in the forced context of the Delta Region.

From an environmental perspective, the forced context is a massive reconfiguration of the Mississippi Delta Forest which provided the ground for the

¹⁵⁴ Gerald Boodoo, "Understanding Church and Theology in the Caribbean Today," in *Many Faces one Church*; "Understanding Church and Theology in the Caribbean Today," in *Many Faces, One Church : Cultural Diversity and the American Catholic Experience*, ed. Peter C. Phan and Diana L. Hayes (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

modern “conditions for life.”¹⁵⁵ Life in the Delta was, by colonial standards, a venture that needed to harness and capitalize on “the means of production.” Under this standard, the trees, the waters of the swamps, the winding curves of the Mississippi River, and its cycles of flooding, were seen as obstacles to securing the conditions for life. However, these conditions for life were not predicated on the experiences of laborers who experienced the Delta from the colonial difference, *their* survival was, in the eyes of the planters and colonial settlers, only a means to maintain life inside the borders of Europe, and by extension, the colonial outposts. Mignolo refers to the colonies and the politic of the U.S., as the global design of European modernity that dominates the local histories of peoples beyond European borders. The dynamics of this domination are complex, and the agents of this domination are not always colonists and colonizers, but also the colonized. The planters invented a system of production that imaged the lands of the Americas as commodity resource zones that would supply Europe with the capital to maintain its influence on the globe. When Europe expanded the reach of its economic interests in cotton, sugar, tobacco, grains and other commodities, its local history spilled out across the Atlantic and forcibly determined the life of the flora and fauna

¹⁵⁵ This phrase is a reference to Gustavo Gutierrez’s thoughts on the conditions necessary for people to live. For Gutierrez, the achievement of these conditions for every human being comprised a social dimension of Christian salvation. He communicates this when he writes, “[Those that]... reduce the work of salvation to the “religious” sphere and are not aware of the universality of the process... [They] think that the work of Christ touches the social order in which we live only indirectly or tangentially, and not in its roots and basic structure. It is those who in order to protect salvation (or protect their interests) lift salvation from the midst of history, where individuals social classes struggle to liberate themselves from the slavery and oppression to which other individuals and social classes have subjected them. It is those who refuse to see that the salvation of Christ is a radical liberation from al misery, all despoliation, and all alienation. It is those who by trying to “save” the work of Christ will “lose” it.”

Gustavo Gutiérrez, Caridad Inchausti, and John Eagleson, *A Theology of Liberation : History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988), 104.

of the Delta Forest. As the statistics on agricultural acreage above reveal, the natural environment underwent immense change as it responded to the many death dealing practices that allowed the colonialists to secure their borders as well as capitalize on the “resources” of the Delta lands.

The tension between the *natural* environment and the *human induced changes to the natural* environment¹⁵⁶ are mainly determined by the interests of the global market, which creates the forced context by which Native Americans, and Amerindians, African enslaved, free persons, and impoverished immigrants from the European world struggle to secure their respective conditions for life. As the colonial world established itself in greater distinction from the modern world of Europe, via war and ideology, the plantation, once seen as a means to continue European capital interests, became an American *thing*. As an American *thing*, the plantation was fixed into the ideologies and cultures that governed the Delta Region. The literature and songs that lament the end of enslavement and the life conditions afforded by slavery for southern landowners are reminders of how the plantation situated itself at the center of southern society. The federally backed Reconstruction, coupled with the insurgent and politically organized black Americans, threatened to bring the plantation to a close. Nostalgic for the supposed “ease” of plantation life, many people all over the United States sang—“I wish I was in [Dixie] the land of cotton/ Old times there are not forgotten.”¹⁵⁷ This song

¹⁵⁶ Saikku, *This Delta, This Land : An Environmental History of the Yazoo-Mississippi Floodplain*, 3.

¹⁵⁷ These lines are an excerpt from the popular war time and post wartime song *Dixie Land*. The song, ironically, was imported from the North and arranged by Daniel Decatur Emmett from Mt. Vernon Ohio. Like many composers of the time looking to start musical careers, Emmett wrote songs that would resonate with the ideals of a southern audience longing for the ease of life associated with the antebellum South. Songs like Dixie, once used to galvanize Confederate troops during the Civil War,

reinforces the “choice” of the plantation as an option for life. However, on the borders of modernity existed a different knowledge—a knowledge that recognized the plantation as a mechanism of death. Such knowledge informs Memphis Minnie’s sentiments which affirm that no “prayer or cry” could erase the vulnerability of levee workers and their families staring at the rising tides of the Delta rivers.

Amid these circumstances, the Delta blues music emerges as a commentary on the “darker” side of this national nostalgia for Dixie. Dixie was no place to live for blues people, their conditions for life were rarely stable, and they were often left eating mixtures of lard and flour celebrated today as the southern delicacy, “biscuits.” The blues, like other cultural and political interventions of the marginalized in the Delta, were inventions that strived to live *in confrontation with*, rather than *in collusion with*, the colonial conditions of life. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that while emancipation from slavery granted a level of physical freedom, the new found status of “freedom” in no way overcame the “forced context” signified here in this work as coloniality. Coloniality, however, does not mute the visions for land based autonomy actualized in the self-organizing activity of black Americans.

Now that one condition (physical freedom) was met, the new challenge for “Freedmen” was to secure a future in relationship with the land. Relationship with the land, however, as indicated in this chapter, required negotiating with the

took on a different shape after the war as they were used to recast the plantation as the ideal that would help the South to recover from the Civil War. For more on the popularity of the song in Southern, American and World popular culture see: Karen L. Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie : How the South Was Created in American Popular Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 9-13.

economic system that had largely *overdetermined* the land under an industrial Plantation Regime. Mechanization, in the form of railroads, steam powered shovels and boats, and cotton gins provided the technological power that replaced the human technology of the chattel slave. Under the new Plantation Regime, hope in relating to the land had new enemies, wage labor and the subsequent systems of debts and liens. Under these conditions, the burden to secure the basic needs of life rested on the back of each freed person. Basic needs, which were somewhat guaranteed by the interest of slave owners to maintain their property, by feeding them and tending to their illnesses, was now solely the responsibility of freed men and women who longed for the fulfillment of their desires for autonomous life. While causality is difficult to determine and is in no way linear, the religious mode of imaging the Delta space as the *sitz em leben* for God's self-disclosure as a liberator God came under great scrutiny. Looking for other options, the formerly enslaved made use of their physical freedom to secure the conditions for life. Amid these entanglements emerged a distinguishable matrix of meaning. This matrix of meaning is known today as the blues. The remainder of our attention will be focused, as one blues commentator writes, on "the statement the blues makes."¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ Murray, *Stomping the Blues*, 68.

Chapter 3

The Blues Cosmivision and Decoloniality: Towards a Blues Perspective on Revelation and Knowledge

Introduction

Blues scholars have taken up many questions. Musicologists have researched the sonic structure of blues music and how it develops as an art form.¹⁵⁹ Cultural studies scholars have looked to unearth the ethnic and idiomatic underpinnings of the peoples who play, sing and dance the blues.¹⁶⁰ Finally, Religious Studies and Theological scholars have worked to understand the spiritual and theistic assumptions that inform blues musicians and their audiences.¹⁶¹ This chapter contributes to this discussion primarily in the areas of Religious, Theological, and Cultural Studies. In particular, this chapter reads the blues from the perspective of

¹⁵⁹The current reflection is indebted to the interviews, musical insights, and other historical information collected by scholars in the field of musicology. However, the reader should note that the effort of this chapter is to prepare the way for theological inquiry into the blues. This speaks to the almost blanket exclusion of theological thought in blues scholarship. This unfortunate exclusion is the result of the binary interpretation of the secular and the sacred in western thought. This I will argue is one of the functions of coloniality that obfuscate how we see cultural production in the modern colonial world. As the chapter develops the reader will be invited to consider how this duality works both from secularist and religionist perspectives. For more on the blues as music see: Kubik, *Africa and the Blues*; Lomax, *The Land Where the Blues Began*; David Evans, *Big Road Blues : Tradition and Creativity in Folk Blues* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Paul Garon, *Blues & the Poetic Spirit, Eddison Blues Books* (London: Eddison Press, 1975); Paul Oliver, *Blues Fell This Morning : The Meaning of the Blues* (New York: Horizon Press, 1960).

¹⁶⁰ For more on the cultural analysis of the blues see: Jeff Todd Titon, *Early Downhome Blues : A Musical and Cultural Analysis*, 2nd ed., *Cultural Studies of the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Murray, *Stomping the Blues*. David Evans, *Ramblin' on My Mind New Perspectives on the Blues* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), <http://muse.jhu.edu/books/9780252091124/>; Baraka, *Blues People : Negro Music in White America*; Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism : Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*; Harrison, *Black Pearls : Blues Queens of the 1920s*; Finn, *The Bluesman : The Musical Heritage of Black Men and Women in the Americas*.

¹⁶¹ For book length treatments on the religious and theological content in the blues see: Spencer, *Blues and Evil*; Jon Michael Spencer, *Self-Made and Blues-Rich* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994); James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation, A Seabury Paperback*, (New York: Seabury Press, 1972); Douglas, *Black Bodies and the Black Church : A Blues Slant*.

the decolonial turn in thought which builds on what we have said in previous chapters about the space of production, the colonial difference, the forced context, and overrepresentation. As a reminder, the decolonial turn is characterized by an effort to change the epistemic frame of reference *from* Europe *to* the cultures *dominated* by European expansion and the establishment of the global world system.

In keeping with the insights of decolonial thought, the blues will be viewed through the idea of cosmovision. Spanish speaking thinkers developed the term *cosmovisión* or cosmovision to reclaim Meso-American spiritual and religious outlooks as foundational to Latin American History.¹⁶² In particular, cosmovision refers to an outlook on the world that includes the physical material world and the immaterial reality of deities, spirits, and forces. This outlook provided a way of both affirming the Meso-American knowledge center as well as a means of provincializing¹⁶³ the world view of the Conquistador. Provincializing requires more than a critical suspicion towards the ideas of Europe, European and American Scholars have done much on this already. Instead, it also requires a creative regeneration and recalling of the local imagination of the dominated. Much like the European idea of *Weltanschauung*¹⁶⁴, which was developed by Kant as an alternative to the Christian Magisterial view of the world, cosmovision was

¹⁶² Esteban Lisa, *La Teoría De La Cosmovisión Y La Teoría De La Relatividad En La Era Espacial; La Revelación De La Armonía Cósmica Invisible En El Universo Y En El Hombre* (Buenos Aires: Instituto de Investigaciones de la Teoría de la Cosmovisión, 1972).

¹⁶³ Provincializing is a term developed by Dipesh Chakrabarty that refers to limiting worldviews to their given times and spaces. For more on this term see: Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe : Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, xii, 42.,

¹⁶⁴ Immanuel Kant and James Creed Meredith, *The Critique of Judgement*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952).

developed as an idea that attempts to affirm and think through living and remembered elements of the Meso-American life world.

In the previous chapters, we have followed this method to distinguish the Delta Region as a space from which the blues emerges. Now that the spatial discourse has situated us in the context, we will look to the epistemic discourse that reflects from within the confines of space. What follows is a mediation on the cosmivision that takes shape in the blues. This mediation will focus on three visible contours of the blues cosmivision: the land, the sonic, and the sensual. These contours emerge when adequate consideration of the blues as an idiomatic expression is allowed to speak unhindered by interests that seek to reduce it to a single category, hence the use of cosmivision. Much ink has been spilled trying to authenticate the blues as American, black, folk, primitive, African, etc. Such interests often reify the Eurocentric racialization that is integral to modernity. In line with the decolonial perspective, the Eurocentric ideas of race, American, folk, and primitive are suspended in this discussion. While I refer to them in passing, the effort here is to see, listen, and engage the blues from the colonial wound. For this reason, it is necessary that this discussion begins with the blues idiom and its implicit epistemic difference. After this, a way will be cleared for a more detailed focus on the land, the sonic, and the sensual.

Blues as Counterstatement and Idiomatic Dance Movement

In his now classic text *Stomping the Blues* (here after as *Stomping*), Albert Murray essays the deep meaning of the blues and the “statement” it makes about the

broader matrix of black American culture.¹⁶⁵ In *Stomping*, Murray distinguishes what he refers to as “the blues as such” and “the blues as dance music.”¹⁶⁶ The “blues as such” refers to the feeling of being in low-spirits, and the blues as “dance music” refers to the artistic stylizations that emerged to cope with “low spirits.” Murray’s working definitions of “the blues as such” and “the blues as dance music,” are helpful in that they clarify the generative character of the blues in ways that resist the categorization of the blues as primitive or purely folkloric. Murray, like other interpreters of his time, most notably Zora Neale Hurston, resisted the dehumanizing tendencies associated with theological, ethnographical, musicological and anthropological interpretations of black American life. Some treatment of the nature of the debates surrounding the phenomena of the blues will help to clarify the difference that thinkers such as Hurston and Murray make for reading the blues from within the colonial wound rather than from within European modernity.

The first distinction is that there are multiple historical trajectories at play in blues interpretation. We will focus on two trajectories, but the reader should remember that each trajectory has its internal diversity and are not monoliths. Both of these histories bear a desire to sustain and recover the tradition. The first trajectory is what we will call the local historical trajectory. The local perspective is alive with the peoples who lived through with the reality of “the blues as such”. The second trajectory is the history of blues scholarship, reflected in the work of Zora Neale Hurston, Alan Lomax, Paul Oliver, Albert Murray, Amiri Baraka (formerly

¹⁶⁵ Murray, *Stomping the Blues*, 250.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

LeRoi Jones), Daphne Duval Harrison and others. Within the second trajectory of blues scholarship, there is another level of difference that the following section will explicate. In short, this is the degree of spatial difference between the Delta Region and the location of the interpreter. Anthropologists describe this as the difference between the emic perspective (indigenous) and the etic perspective (foreign outsider).

Often, the peoples who experience the “the blues as such” are considered *the subjects* of those that do intellectual work on the blues, its contexts, and the peoples that produce the blues idiom. Nevertheless, some thinkers can speak more closely to the *emic*, an insider perspective while primarily concealed within the *etic*, the perspective of an outsider.¹⁶⁷ Emic and etic perspectives are not mutually exclusive. However, it is important to note how these perspectives are also “forced” by coloniality. Mignolo’s idea of “local histories” and “global designs” is helpful in clarifying this point.

Local Histories, Global Designs, and Blues Hermeneutics

In the first chapter, it was discussed that local histories refer to the basic ways in which human groups sustain their memories and interpretations of time and space. Global designs refer to the colonial or imperial histories that impose their

¹⁶⁷ Emic and Etic are terms originally coined by Kenneth Pike. Pike developed the terms as a means of distinguishing linguistic and tonal differences between cultures. Since Pike, more work has been done to dismantle the binary way in which the terms could be used. For more on emic and etic see: Kenneth Lee Pike, *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior*, Preliminary ed., 2 vols. (Glendale, Calif.: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1954), 8. For a treatment of emic and etic in human behavior see: Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory : A History of Theories of Culture* (New York: Crowell, 1968), 568-604. For a treatment of the debates on the usage and meaning of emic and etic see: Thomas N. Headland et al., *Emics and Etics : The Insider/Outsider Debate, Frontiers of Anthropology* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1990).

“design” of the world, their time/space, onto other local histories. We can see this phenomenon happening in both trajectories of history (the local and the scholarly, mentioned above). In regards to blues people, their local history is characterized by the imposition of the Global Design of Western Modernity onto their ancestral peoples of Africa—taken from their homelands, enslaved, and forced into chattel relationships with European slavers and plantation owners. Black American culture, for many, is the larger historical grouping that situates blues history as a local history. The broader historical scope of American history, then, is a history of the mobilization of modernity and its violent consequences for Amerindian, black American, Native American, Caribbean, and Indo-Caribbean cultures.

The entanglements of violent¹⁶⁸ consequences make up Mignolo’s “colonial difference” or “colonial difference(s).” Viewing history from the colonial difference requires attention to the inner complexities and perspectives of local histories as well as the inner complexities of the Global Design referred to here as the modernity/coloniality imaginary. Coloniality does not express a pure space where modernity is not. Rather, it refers to the power dynamics that determine how human persons experience and access “modernity.” Modern “local histories” are constitutive with the “long duration” of European expansion and globalization. It is important to note, however, that the experiences of European expansion by non-

¹⁶⁸ By violent here the effort is to follow Dussel’s understanding of sacrificial violence as that which is hidden by the myth of modern progress that does not acknowledge the foundational violence and the violence that must continue in order to continue the project of modernity. See: Enrique D. Dussel, Javier Krauel, and Virginia C. Tuma, “Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism,” *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 472, <https://muse.jhu.edu/journals/nepantla/v001/1.3dussel.html>.

Europeans are not monolithic, and the interpreter should always give attention to *difference(s)*.

In the anthropological studies of the blues, there are multiple expressions of both “local histories” and “global designs.” Looking at the *emic* perspectives on the blues provides an opportunity to bracket racial difference as the primary hermeneutic for how to read the blues.¹⁶⁹ Bracketing race avoids repeating the racialization dynamics of coloniality that would see the blues primarily as an affirmation of a pure black essence, which mimics the “purity” of the white essence of Eurocentrism. Alternatively, the effort here is to think about the blues as expressions of people’s engagement with the violent consequences of the modern project. The same method of bracketing binary constructions could prove helpful in decentering some other binary tropes: sacred vs. profane, fine art vs. folk art, male vs. female, insider vs. outsider, religionist vs. secularist, etc. Below it is suggested that these binaries are Eurocentric impositions and do not reflect the local histories of black American, African or pre-Modern American culture. As such, the above binaries can be understood theoretically as expressions of the local history of Europe “designing” the world through the imposition of what Enrique Dussel calls “sacrificial violence.”

¹⁶⁹ It is important to remember, however, as critical anthropological scholarship has argued, that *etic* perspectives are also achievable by supposed “insiders” to cultural productions. The *emic* and *etic* distinctions are mainly used here to indicate the type of work produced by the interpreter. *Etic* and *Emic* formulations are not seen here as strict designations of “insiders” and “outsider” hermeneutics. These distinctions in no way place any restrictive claim on interpreters and interpreting community’s ability to mediate cultural productions. Rather, the aim here is to see the forced context and coloniality as power dynamics that affect both *emic* and *etic* cultural hermeneutics. For more on *emic* and *etic* see: Headland et al., *Emics and Etics : The Insider/Outsider Debate*.

Dussel's argument is worth mentioning here, especially because of how he highlights a fundamental concealment of violence in the project of modernity. The concealment of violence has serious implications for grasping the relationships between the blues as a local history and the reception of the blues through the global design of Europe. Dussel considers the problem of Eurocentrism at the level of the idea. The "idea" of Europe, Dussel contends, is irrationally based on the myth that Europe will provide "a way out" for all of those humans who remain stuck in a primitive state of being.¹⁷⁰ Moreover, this "way out" necessitates sacrificial violence against all that stand in the way of Europe's modernizing mission. Dussel highlights this when he writes:

...if one aims at overcoming modernity, it becomes necessary to deny the denial of the myth of modernity from an ethics of responsibility. Thus, the other denied and victimized side of modernity must first be unveiled as "innocent": it is the "innocent victims" of ritual sacrifice that in the self-realization of their innocence cast modernity as guilty of a sacrificial and conquering violence—that is, of a constitutive, originary, essential violence. By way of denying the innocence of modernity and of affirming the alterity of the other (which was previously denied), it is possible to "discover" for the first time the hidden "other side" of modernity: the peripheral colonial world, the sacrificed indigenous peoples, the enslaved black, the oppressed woman, the alienated infant, the estranged popular culture: the victims of modernity, all of them victims of an irrational act that contradicts modernity's ideal of rationality.¹⁷¹

While unforeseen by Dussel, the blues gives nuance meaning to the "enslaved black" and the "estranged popular culture." Keeping in mind this decolonial perspective on the blues, we see cosmivision as a basis for generating a U.S. based decolonial epistemic. The remainder of this chapter endeavors to see the blues as already doing

¹⁷⁰ Dussel, Krauel, and Tuma, "Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism," 473.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

the work of what Dussel articulates as “overcoming modernity through the self-realization of innocence that cast modernity as guilty of a sacrificial and conquering violence.” This approach does not mean that the blues people and those that play the blues through music and dance are slavishly fulfilling Dussel’s theoretical assertions. Rather, it simply reflects Dussel’s insights on the praxis of violence constitutive of modernity and how it conceals the many voices that not only endure violence, but produce culture to assert themselves otherwise. The Eurocentric appeals to rationality as “a way out” of the Kantian *immaturity* in no way casts a totalizing shadow over all the peoples of the Americas, but the power of this shadow is always operative.¹⁷²

Blues along with other indigenous cosmovisions are not representative of a perpetual state of infancy or immaturity that requires an imposed development from the outside. Nor are the blues people, as can be extrapolated from Dussel’s insights, reflective of a people who are willing to sacrifice their cosmovision for the promises of modernity and its projected contribution of a universal humanity. Rather, the blues is, quite simply, a people living out a life amid the dynamics of modernity and its violent coloniality. The reception of the blues in musicology, ethnomusicology, theology, religion, and culture are also entangled within the dynamics of the modern/colonial world. A brief look at the debates over the interpretation of the blues will help to clarify this further.

¹⁷²Ibid., 469.

The Blues Debate: Problems in the Recovery and Interpretation of Black Cultural Production

Earlier it was mentioned that the intellectual history of the blues had its level of diversity. Some treatment of this diversity is necessary so that we might distinguish the emic and etic interpretations of the blues a little further. First, it is important to note that most of what we know about the blues as a sonic cultural production comes from the work of ethnomusicological research that pivoted on the technological advancements of sound recording.¹⁷³ Projects such as Alan Lomax's, *The Land Where the Blues Began*, and Paul Oliver's, *The Blues Fell this Morning*, are representative *etic* works peering into the world of the *emic*. Both Lomax and Oliver are avid listeners and mediators of the blues culture and have done a great deal to merge etic and emic perspectives in their works.

As a folklorist and ethnomusicologist, Lomax wanted his recording expeditions to arrive at the most "primitive" or "natural" expression of the black American idiom that he could find. Oliver, on the other hand, was primarily guided by an effort to find the many coded "meanings" in blues lyrics. Both of these researchers limited much of their work to speaking with blues artists, recovering musical traditions, and deciphering song lyrics. From this data, both Lomax and Oliver sought to decipher the blues as a lively subculture bubbling underneath more normative images of black Americans. These "standard" images were produced both

¹⁷³ Stephen A. King, *I'm Feeling the Blues Right Now : Blues Tourism in the Mississippi Delta* (Jackson, MS, USA: University Press of Mississippi, 2011), 20; 28-31.

by an emergent black American socio-political vanguard and the outside gaze of European Americans.

Motivated by an effort to capture the *soul* of American life from those who lived life uninhibited by the *decadence* of modern progress, participants in the American Folklore found the blues an ideal object of study.¹⁷⁴ The blues aesthetic, along with American indigenous culture, Bluegrass, Country and other southern folklore genres, were often romanticized as a rugged simplicity, crudeness, or primitivism on which nationalists could build an image of the bedrock of American culture.¹⁷⁵ The development of folklore anthropology provided a soft recognition of what has been eluded to above as the “alterity of the other” via Dussel, or the colonial difference by Mignolo. Folklore provided fodder for constructing an American cultural past that allowed the U.S. to establish a national identity in distinction from its European roots. Ironically, it was only repeating what Europe had done with its indigenous cultures and peasantry.¹⁷⁶ This reification of the folk, similar Mignolo analysis, further extended the global design of Europe. In Europe, folklore projects focused on peasant cultures served as a living representation and reminder of the past that contrasted the idea of a Modern Europe. In the U.S., frontier women and men, indigenous Americans, and eventually black Americans

¹⁷⁴ Gary W. McDonogh, Robert Gregg, and Cindy H. Wong, *Encyclopedia of Contemporary American Culture* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2001), 266-77. For a treatment of Folklore and its effects on racial identity see: Shirley Moody-Turner, *Black Folklore and the Politics of Racial Representation, Margaret Walker Alexander Series in African American Studies* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi,), <http://muse.jhu.edu/books/9781617038853/>.

¹⁷⁵ See Vine Deloria on this in relation to indigenous peoples: Deloria, *God Is Red : A Native View of Religion*, 256.

¹⁷⁶ Matthew Campbell and Michael Perraudin, *The Voice of the People : Writing the European Folk Revival, 1760-1914, Anthem European Studies* (London: Anthem Press, 2012), 1-2.

(and their enslaved ancestry) were seen as the soul of what it meant to be American. Nevertheless, as folklorist projects developed, many of the researchers for the development of Folklore saw firsthand the deep seated violence and oppression that marred the lives of the supposed “folk.” Oliver and Lomax’s desire to find the “real” blues or the blues idiom in its most pure musical form was coupled with assumptions about the conditions that would produce “the real blues.” Both Lomax and Oliver admit the limits in their projects, due to their inability to access the blues life world (the emic) fully. While Lomax and Oliver make reference to the precarious conditions of blues singers and their contexts, they are more concerned with representing the blues music as a repository of a secular working class turn amongst black Americans. A brief look into Lomax’s field work experiences will help to clarify this point.

As a field work tactic, Lomax often thought it better to recruit black folklorist from leading black universities as a means of validating his presence in black communities that would look upon his intentions with suspicion. On one of his visits to Fisk University in Nashville, TN he found that many black intellectuals saw little value in recovering black folk culture as their eyes were on the ideals of lifting the race from disenfranchisement to social-economic equality.¹⁷⁷ Blues, for many black Americans, represented a cultural artifact that was no longer alive in the new ethos of black uplift, Christian piety, and progress. Lomax criticized this negative disposition of the Fisk intellectuals towards rural black culture and the blues. In his writings, Lomax communicates his disdain by constructing a class conflict between

¹⁷⁷ Lomax, *The Land Where the Blues Began*, xii.

rural working class black Americans and an identifiable black intellectual vanguard motivated by the politics of uplift.¹⁷⁸ Against his judgement, Lomax convinced Fisk University (the black middle class vanguard by his assertion) to take up his project which began field work in the 1940's. Accompanied by Fisk composer John Work and his assistant Lewis Jones, Lomax thought that he would gain more access to his self-described "cultural wellspring of the underprivileged majority" and the "dynamics of their constant creativity."¹⁷⁹ Lomax's recognition of his inability to access the emic via proxy and his simultaneous disillusionment with those whom he thought were emic interpreters, albeit learned, is telling.

His distrust of the black professional intellectual class and their disposition towards the blues as passé, primitive, or backwards is telling of his ideas of class, authenticity, folk aesthetics, popular culture, and race. Lomax articulates his distrust when he writes,

The Fisk study came closer to the people of the Delta but failed to show that the Mississippi working class, whom Richard Wright so despised, had a dynamic culture that constantly enriched their surroundings. Clearly, these underprivileged blacks had transformed every situation, every aspect of their environment—dance, orchestration, religion, work, speech—making them over in their own image. But the Fisk study had failed to locate the cultural wellsprings of this underprivileged majority....¹⁸⁰

With these words, Lomax is writing to an intra-racial dynamic that also has emic and etic proportions. In short, how one reads culture is also a function of the influence of culture. Lomax, an outsider to what he sees as an intra-racial class conflict dynamic,

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., xi-xiii;39-42.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., xii-xii.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

is read here as the cultural dynamics of negotiating coloniality and the forced context. This reading is in counter distinction from Lomax's view that assumes the assimilation of formerly enslaved blacks to *de facto* constructs of working and middle class, lettered and unlettered, etc. Lomax's desire to recover the blues essence, in particular, and folk essence on a world level, as a result, may have caused him to underestimate the ways in which both the idea of "folklore" and its reception are consequences of the modern project. Folklore recovery projects do historical work for those that supposedly do not *do* history in a modern way. By modern historical method we mean, here, the construction of a folkloric past on which to base a progressive modern future.

Black American scholars such as Zora Neale Hurston and Albert Murray recognized this to some degree and moved to translate between the cultural locations of the black intellectual life and the supposed "folk" space because they were to some degree formed by both spaces. Lomax's disappointment with the Fisk project and his reading of Richard Wright as one who "supposedly despised black rural culture," is misguided. This misque in Lomax's thought rests in his inability to see what we have named here as *the colonial difference* of those who are formed by racialization (coloniality), yet inspired to struggle for liberation through art, the intellectual life, and political struggle. While more can be said both about Hurston and Wright, I will focus my attention on Murray. Of the three, Murray provides the most explicit critical assessment of blues scholarship shaped by the *idea* of folk art. In distinction from Lomax, Murray read blues music as a stylization on the blues idiom that was foundational rather than derivative to the playing of blues music.

The emphasis on stylization is significant because folk interpreters used stylization - or the individual creativity of an artist—to measure their deviation from a supposed blues essence. The blues essence according to Murray is a *construction*. As a *construction*, it is primarily produced from the *etic* perspective of the observer looking in on the blues world. Folk art interpretations of blues music, Murray argued, were all too hasty to read the blues as primitive in comparison to European standards of fine art. To this point Murray writes:

The seldom questioned assumption that folk creativity is the primal source or wellspring of art and technology is... misleading. Being inherently conservative or traditional, folk expression is necessarily imitative and thus not primordial in any intrinsic sense at all but derivative.¹⁸¹

Here, Murray reminds that the blues is not *original* but *imitative*. Murray's insight is significant because of how he reads in between the *etic* and *emic* perspective. Part of this may flow from Murray's proximity to the blues as an Alabama native. Murray, knew the blues experience through living his life as much as he did by reading through its archived history. Because of this, Murray was able to intuit that blues musicians were not representatives of a primitive past, but modern sustainers of a long standing and fluctuating idiom.

In this move, Murray decenters the Eurocentric rationality which relegates the non-European as stuck in a perpetual state of immaturity (i.e. primitive). Folk culture as an idea is a function of the modern Eurocentric rationality in so far as it reads human history through the binary myth of development and underdevelopment. This myth remains veiled behind the good intentions that

¹⁸¹ Murray, *Stomping the Blues*, 204.

romanticize, recover, and extract a supposed “folk culture.” The blues, for the etic folklorist, is in essence a pure form marked by an absence of rational stylization. This distinction relegates blues to the past but not just any past. The blues as a representation of the past is *constructed* to distinguish further modern art as “naturally” evolved and blues art as “naturally” un-evolved. That many black Americans distanced themselves from association with the blues as a means of projecting a more “civil” or “sanctified” self-image is telling of this point.

From Murray’s emic insights, blues art is just as “modern” and “developed,” i.e. stylized as any other art. Stated in another way, the American “folk” is the latest expression of confrontation with the modern/colonial world. Aesthetic variations of blues artists are no less stylized or novel than their supposed “developed” fine art contemporaries. The body of Murray’s work outside of *Stomping* reflects his position on the debate over fine art vs. folk art.¹⁸² Murray disagreed with the idea

¹⁸² It is important to remember Murray is writing in a politicized context where the interpretation of black cultural production and black experience were asserting themselves in polemical ways. This polemic can be categorized generally as a romantic view of black American life and a pathological view of Black America. Where one stood in this spectrum had much to do with the then ongoing debate between Melville Herskovits’ idea of *Africanisms* and E. Franklin Frazier’s idea of black U.S. *nativism*. Herskovits argued that the cultural production of black Americans was based on retentions from an African past that survived enslavement. Frazier, on the other hand, argued that the systematic enslavement and racialization of black Americans was so totalizing that it completely fragmented any African cultural basis on which the enslaved could base their humanity. For this reason, Frazier argued that black Americans were more native to America than they were African. Frazier’s work was used to affirm a more pathological treatment of black American culture and Herskovits has often been used to buttress a romantic outlook on black American culture as a newly fashioned African people. Murray is representative of the Herskovits romanticism, but does not depend on the idea of *Africanisms*. For Murray, what is exceptional is the ability of black Americans to articulate their idiom as a response to the deep feeling of “low-Spirits.” Murray’s critics have accused him of romanticizing black culture as being widely integral to the fabric of American culture, which ironically sides him more theoretically with Frazier’s idea of nativism. However, Murray has a positivist idea of nativism where Frazier has a more analytical outlook that at times leans towards the pathological. Murray articulates the artistry of black Americans as heroic, hence the title of his text on literature, *Hero and the Blues*. In contrast to this “heroic outlook,” some social activists and state policy agents thought it better to paint black persons as victims. This tactical decision has been infused in U.S. social activism as early as the abolitionist movement. Murray and others feared that

that fine art was the achievement of a more developed style while folk art was a more primitive (not necessarily pejorative) or natural source for fine art. Further, Murray argued that the social-political conditions facing black Americans were not the sole cause of black American cultural productions. The lives of black Americans were more than just a direct reaction to disenfranchisement and socio-economic oppression. The lives of black Americans also included moments of genius, ingenuity, and heroism. In distinction from the assumptions about a folk art essence and the supposed spontaneous naturalism in folk art, Murray posited that all blues music was a stylization formed by the artistic demands of the local community. In Murray's assessment, the distinction between fine art and folk art was an abstraction that revealed more about the European bias towards *avant garde* progressivism than it did a primordial essence within blues music. The repeated attempts of folklorists to distinguish a primordial essence in blues music is an example of how modernity, as Mignolo's idea of the global design suggests, imagines the world in its image of history.

Murray's approach almost anticipates the decolonial turn in so far as it recognizes that the modern disciplines of the academy are themselves culturally situated projects of naming the reality. As such, the modern disciplines, in this case, aesthetics, are reflections of a Eurocentric project that takes on some new shape in

the negative sociological analysis of black experience would do injury to the ways in which black Americans understood themselves in the world. Critics on the other end of the polemic feared that the romantic interpretations of black life or a black exceptionalism would distract efforts to shame state officials of their lack of concern for the black victims of enslavement and Jim Crow. For more on the dynamics of the pathological vs. the romantic view see: W.J. Moses, *Black Messiahs and Uncle Toms: Social and Literary Manipulations of a Religious Myth* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 17-30.

the Americas but continues the myth of Occidentalism and the concealment of violence. With this perspective in mind, the blues, as Julio Finn writes, begins at the moment when African peoples were captured, bought, and sold. Blues people are primarily representative of this event more so than they are an artistic essence. Further, Finn contends that “America literally gave the slaves the blues.”¹⁸³ These blues, as discussed in the previous chapter on the Delta Region, are conditioned by the entanglements of environmental, epistemic, and political dynamics. Nevertheless, the blues, as cultural production is not totally determined by the spaces in which it is sung, danced, spoken and played. In counter distinction from racialization, the commodification of the land, the demonization of the sexual freedom, and the codification of the sonic matrix into sacred and profane, the blues affirms the deep cosmic loss that results from the dislocation of African peoples. The blues affirms a sensuality and sexuality that rivals Afro-Christian heteronormativity, monogamy, and patriarchy. Finally, the blues recognition of the sonic as a mediation of spiritual presence defies the pejorative claims that labeled the blues, “Devil’s music.” The above methodological points are meant to clarify the entanglements that situate the blues cosmology and the tripartite contours of the land, the sensual, and the sonic. We will now turn to the land, first, since it is so closely related to the spatial dynamics of the modern/colonial world.

¹⁸³ Finn, *The Bluesman : The Musical Heritage of Black Men and Women in the Americas*, 5.

The Land and the Arrested Cosmovision of Blues People

Many working cosmovisions treat the earth or the land as an expression of a deity, the basis of life, or the ground of existence. As we saw via the insights of Saikku, the imposition of the Euro-American agricultural landscape disrupted the indigenous view of the land as subject. Saikku's environmentalist outlook characterized the Native American cosmovision as one that resulted in more modest impositions on the flora and fauna of the Delta Forest. For blues people, however, the vision for a relationship with the land on their terms was experienced more as a type of longing rather than a fully articulated experience. This longing almost became a reality for a short while during the Reconstruction period. During this time, the Freedman's Bureau and wartime land appropriation acts such as Field Order 15 made it possible for some black Americans, during and after the end of the Civil War in 1865 to own land, in the Delta Region.¹⁸⁴ The Homestead Act¹⁸⁵ and other forms of legislation aimed to assist the enslaved in acquiring land and the means to produce crops from the land. This moment is significant because it had the potential to reverse the hegemony of the Eurocentric form of the division of labor. As Quijano argues, the coloniality of power is built on the two axes: the racialization of labor roles and the organization of all forms of labor under one global system of capitalism. The Reconstruction period presented one of the few opportunities in U.S. history when black Americans, backed by the power of military and government,

¹⁸⁴ Harding, *There Is a River : The Black Struggle for Freedom in America*, 267-72. See also: Steven Hahn, *Land and Labor, 1865, Freedom, a Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 19, 396.

¹⁸⁵ Woods, *Development Arrested : The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta*, 62.

were able to have a say over how they would situate themselves about the land. This moment is crucial because it provided the conditions necessary to dismantle the myth that Africans, and their enslaved descendants, were “naturally” predisposed to the role of being chattel. At the end of the Civil War, the land was one of the most coveted ideas in the minds of free black Americans.¹⁸⁶ Inspired by Field Order 15 and the Homestead Act, formerly enslaved black Americans saw land and land ownership as the primary means of securing a sustainable vision for life.¹⁸⁷ However, this moment was short lived and only provided options for those who were financially capable of securing the means to farm their received lands appropriately. Some black elite, such as Isaiah Montgomery, who inherited parts of the Jefferson Davis plantation in Mound Bayou MS, were able to build sustainable communities about the land that still stand today.¹⁸⁸

While communities such as Mound Bayou participated in the machine of capitalism, some of the extended family practices and sharing of resources pushed back on the planter ideology which argued that African descendants were not

¹⁸⁶Land was imaged in religious, economic, and political understandings after the end of the civil war by many black Americans used the imagery of the Exodus Narrative, especially the idea of the Promised Land and crossing the River Jordan. Crossing the river Jordan became a symbol of perseverance and hope in both human perseverance and Divine intervention. After enslavement many black Americans hoped that they would be granted lands from which to base their future but without the tools and supplies to work the lands many blacks lost hope and ended up right back in systems of disenfranchisement. Ibid., 82-83. See also: Harding, *There Is a River : The Black Struggle for Freedom in America*, 310-17.

¹⁸⁷ Field Order 15 an act issued by William T. Sherman towards the end of the Civil War in 1865. The act deeded over 400,000 acres of Confederate lands (along the Atlantic Coasts of Florida, Georgia, and the Carolinas) to formerly enslaved black Americans. The Homestead Act was a piece of legislation that was enacted at the same time of the Freedman’s Bureau. It provided opportunities for Americans to settle lands in the plain states and as far west as California. Many black Americans saw the Homestead Act as an option for a new future. See: Harding, *There Is a River : The Black Struggle for Freedom in America*, 315-16. For more on the Homestead Act and the Freedman’s Bureau see: Hahn, *Land and Labor, 1865*, 462-66.

¹⁸⁸ Woods, *Development Arrested : The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta*, 84-85.

mentally equipped to organize themselves in sustainable ways. Planters worked hard to impose the ideology of race on small landowning white farmers. Eventually, their efforts succeeded, and the planters divided the interracial Populist movement along racial lines. From the perspective of the planters, black enfranchisement and cooperative economics, across racial lines, threatened to end the relationship of dependency between the paternalistic white male landowner and the ignorant subsistence farmers who were “naturally” uninterested in harnessing the land as a means of producing their visions for life.¹⁸⁹ Viewed from this perspective, the Populist movement, before its fragmentation along racial lines, prefigures a decolonial turn in that it deracialized the division of labor and offered alternatives to the plantation vision, which saw the land as an absolute commodity. The Populist movement pushed for subsistence and local visions of the land rather than capital.¹⁹⁰ Had the populist movement succeeded, the hegemony of the planter ideology over land, labor, and resources would have likely been weakened, if not dismantled. Planters were aware of this and worked tirelessly in disrupting all efforts of the interracial coalition which threatened their power. No event reflects the planters’ fear of black enfranchisement better than the terroristic and legislative

¹⁸⁹ Eugene D. Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Fatal Self-Deception : Slaveholding Paternalism in the Old South* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), Ch. 6.

¹⁹⁰ Steven Hahn’s research on southern populism and the self-organizing activity of black Americans gives clues to how populist farmers, colloquially referred to as yeoman farmers, were politically independent of the planters and the enterprising venture capitalist from northern states. In particular, Hahn notes how the idea of racial hierarchy was not always shared across all landowning whites. Independence, rather than racial superiority, was the ideal that unified many white tenant and small farmers. Prior to the more unified vision of white supremacy under the auspices of the *Dred Scot* decision and Jim Crow, the yeoman farmer saw organization with black sharecroppers as an option for gaining independence from the planters and their monopoly over southern lands, crops, and labor. For more on this see: Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet : Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration*.

tactics used to entrap black Americans in debt relationships in the systems of sharecropping and tenant farming.¹⁹¹ This dynamic was but one step removed from the practices of enslavement.

Violent entrapment, via lynchings and other terroristic means, is one of the most complicated pieces of history to interpret because of the ways in which race gets implicated in how interpreters record and read history. Southern history is all too often read in black and white with little attention to how the idea of the plantation muted interracial visions for life that were not necessarily tied to civil rights. These racially charged readings echo Dussel's insights above concerning how modernity creates an estrangement of popular culture. Reading the history of the enslaved and formerly enslaved peoples requires attention to how human beings arrange themselves in space. The focus on race distracts from this task by assuming relationships rather than understanding the dynamic activities by which peoples engage one another. In the case of the Delta Region, most of the human relationships with the land were overdetermined by the planters and their Mississippi Plan. Traditionally, black political efforts to secure land based autonomy or a land based future is read through the prism of black political excellence and exceptionalism.

¹⁹¹ The development of terroristic violence against black Americans was not purely motivated by racial hatred. This was only a symptom of the propaganda tactics necessary to justify paramilitary activity against black enfranchisement and the organization strategies of black churches, Union Leagues, and Farmers Alliances that worked to secure black male suffrage and the right to determine their own vision for the lands of the Delta. The history of these organizations, their tactics, and outlooks, say more about local histories and settings than they do about an essential black subjectivity or identity. The history of the Ku Klux Klan, the organization most commonly associated with anti-black terror, is all too often understood as organized white supremacy against helpless black victims. Such a reading veils how anti-black terror was a tactic used to influence the changing politics of the South which was torn between a body politic of interracial coalition and racial separatism. For more on this see: *ibid.*, 264-313.

Black historians often herald leaders such as Martin Delany for their heroic acts in politics and the organization of black labor. The catalogue of vanguard leadership only tells part of the story. The history of southern politics before the implementation of separatist legislation reveals interracial alliances of small farmers, sharecroppers, and tenant farmers organized around anti-plantation visions of the land. Such a vision was more geared towards political independence from the Plantation Regime than it was an appeal to integration within the representative governments of the former Confederacy.

However, non-participation in representative government does not mean that black-Americans were politically deficient and solely dependent on outside development to engage in political activity. Post-bellum enfranchisement strategies across racial lines would not have posed a threat to the planters and their Mississippi Plan if black Americans had not already been cultivating organization strategies of their own during enslavement. Steven Hahn and Wilson Jeremiah Moses remind that black organization strategies for enfranchisement are often overshadowed by grand narratives of black leaders primarily from urban centers.¹⁹² This overshadowing is thought to be the result of long standing stereotypes that employ the Eurocentric ideal of underdevelopment as a means of interpreting rural

¹⁹² Moses offers a compelling argument that connects the U.S. black religious imagination with social and political organization strategies amongst black Americans. His approach takes up the history of messianism in the social, political, and literary imagination of black Americans. Moses argues that messianism is manipulated and adopted in ways that produce mythical interpretations of black American leaders. For more on this see: Moses, *Black Messiahs and Uncle Toms: Social and Literary Manipulations of a Religious Myth*, 17-29; Hahn's history is similar to Moses' and recovers the popular committee organizing strategies of emancipated black Americans from 1865 through the early 20th century. See: Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet : Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration*, 164 -72.

black Americans and the rural labor class at large. Often rural black organization efforts are not viewed in the same light as the organization efforts of factory workers in the North. Persons motivated by a liberal tendency tend to be more inclusive of the disenfranchised while maintaining the basic hegemonic structure of global market capitalism exacerbate the misrepresentation of all black persons as underdeveloped. When the reader of black American history assumes a linear development from the slave revolts to civil rights, these moments of coloniality are overlooked. Hahn's research problematizes this assumption and offers an alternative view of rural organization efforts amongst non-plantation owning southerners. Rural black Americans, such as those living in the Delta, also recognized for themselves the necessity of organization against the plantation ideology. One visible representation of their organizational strategies after enslavement is the appearance of labor squads. Labor squads were groups of workers, organized mainly along family and extended family lines.¹⁹³ These groups determined for themselves the division of labor and negotiated their wages with landlords.

Because the post-Civil War rural work place was mainly wage based, squads provided a level of autonomy for the black labor force in that it decentered the landowner from determining the terms of labor.¹⁹⁴ Hahn notes that some squads decided that women did not have to labor in the cotton fields to receive wages. Married men in labor squads often refused to enter into contracts that required

¹⁹³ Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet : Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration*, 166.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 167.

their wives to work. On the surface, it would seem that this was a means of black men mimicking the patriarchal power dynamics of white landowning males. However, Hahn notes that it is reasonable to think that black American women would prefer not to be under the direct jurisdiction of a landowner after experiencing the threat of rape which was often a part of the reality of enslavement.¹⁹⁵ While squads are but one example, it situates the ways in which black Americans organized to determine their relationships with the imposed agricultural landscape (Eurocentric ecohistory). Rather than being individual wage earners subject to the manipulation of violent landowners, the collective organization provided *a level* of autonomy amongst the formerly enslaved.

The success of squads and other kinship based organizations worked to decenter the power of the landowners. This decentering is chronicled in the material records of those landowners who wrote letters of complaint to the Freedmen's Bureau complaining about the effects of squad enfranchisement to their bottom line.¹⁹⁶ Squads hampered the landowners' ability to secure the profits that they accrued during slavery. With the federal mandates enforced by the Freedmen's Bureau and the Union Troops backing the enfranchisement of black Americans, landowners were subject to pay wages according to the conditions set by the squads.¹⁹⁷ From the worldview of the landowning planters, squad organization was an insurgent act against the "natural order." It is not surprising that a counter insurgent mobilization had to be organized to retard the budding success labor

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 169-71.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 172.

¹⁹⁷ Harding, *There Is a River : The Black Struggle for Freedom in America*, 298.

squads. Sharecropping was one part of the counter insurgent tactics mobilized by the southern landowning elites.

Sharecropping allowed landowners to share the risk associated with enduring the growing season and the global market. In squad arrangements, landowners incurred an upfront risk and had to pay for labor no matter their profits from the growing season. In the sharecropping arrangements, landowners often manipulated workers through systems of debt and entrapment.¹⁹⁸ Because black persons with agricultural skills did not own the means of production, such as animals, food, tools, seed, and other supplies, they had to purchase them on credit. This new system of credit allowed for many forms of manipulation and soon became the main form of controlling labor in the South. The effort was two pronged. First, planters would lock freed peoples in systems of debt. Second, they would organize systems of terror and disenfranchisement that impeded blues people from organizing their labor, knowledge and skills.

While the historical entanglements of the black American visions for the land cannot be fully addressed here, it is important to note the deep desire for land based autonomy among rural black Americans. The desire for a space from which to actualize a vision for life is a part of the emergent cosmivision affirmed here as the blues cosmivision. In this emergent cosmivision, the land is the basis for life and the material by which God discloses God's presence (more on this in Chapter 4). The imposition of the plantation bloc of power disrupts this process by viewing the land

¹⁹⁸ Woods, *Development Arrested : The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta*, 92-93.

as a commodity available mainly to the persons with the surplus means to harness its potential capital. From the blues perspective, the Reconstruction period, as Clyde Woods argues, is an “arrested development.”¹⁹⁹ As an arrested development the blues way of organization is always latent and hidden beneath the history of the plantation bloc of power and its ecohistory. Nevertheless, the plantation bloc of power does not tell the entire story of counter-insurgency and the suppression of the blues hope for land based autonomy. The reception of Protestantism by black Americans and its mobilization into church based communities has also participated in a type of suppression of the blues outlook. This suppression is significant because it reveals how “slave religion” and the “memory of African cultures” became an embarrassment for black American Christians looking to present themselves as worthy of inclusion in the supposed “freedom” of American democracy.

Land based autonomy, was only partially achieved during Presidential Reconstruction and actively resisted and overturned during Radical Reconstruction.²⁰⁰ At every moment, black American visions and efforts to be in relation to the land was resisted and seen as an act of insurgency by the Plantation Regime.²⁰¹ When the prospect of land based autonomy became difficult to achieve,

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 54.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 66-71. Presidential Reconstruction (1865-1866) generally refers to the post-War efforts of the federal government to recover control over labor and restore the production power of southern plantations. Radical Reconstruction (1866-1867) refers to a move by a congressional committee to weaken the political power of the southern planters that was gained under Presidential Reconstruction. Woods highlights the self-organizing activity of black Americans that often goes undertreated in the normative historical accounts of this period.

²⁰¹ The historical record is replete with letters written by freed black Americans to the Freedman’s Bureau requesting that the Union reconsider the reconciliation project which returned the Confederate lands to their pre-Civil War owners. In addition, there are letters that recount the violent treatment experienced by black Americans who possessed deeds to the lands that were once the space of their enslavement. One Statement recorded in Jackson, Mississippi recount two black

black Americans developed diverse ways to cope with their marginalization from the means to establish their futures. One of these ways was via consumerism. Religious historian, John Giggie argues that scholars of black religion often understate the phenomenon of consumerism in the religious imagination of the formerly enslaved.²⁰² Giggie identifies how the ability of black Americans to modestly participate in the market began to influence the spiritual outlook of black Protestant Christian religion. Church literature and sermons recorded from 1875-1915 reveal how the ability, albeit limited, to purchase products became a central part of the religious material world. Modest dress, bibles, and the adorning of churches with chandeliers and other products symbolized a right relationship with God.²⁰³ Ideas of sanctification and conversion often came with expectations of how one would tend to their personal appearance as well as the appearances of their churches and homes.²⁰⁴

The Land, Afro-Christianity, and Coloniality

The move towards consumerism is significant because of how the importance of the land is subverted underneath the “freedom” to participate in the consumer market. The promises of greater access to the consumer market, a market built ironically on the backs of their disenfranchised labor and the slave labor of

American land owners who found a note attached to a stake on their property. The note read, “I think you better leave here.” Prior to finding the note the two land owners, Nelson Porter and William Head reported three men telling them that if they built cabins on their recently acquired property that they would be shot. For more on this and other documents see: Hahn, *Land and Labor, 1865, 722-23.*

²⁰² John Michael Giggie, *After Redemption : Jim Crow and the Transformation of African American Religion in the Delta, 1875-1915* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 22-24.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 141.

their ancestors, decentered the hope for autonomy that once was the object of the “promised land” imagery. This moment is pivotal in the theological imagination because it marks an acceptance of the agricultural/industrial society (European eco-history) as the primary configuration of space from which the Afro-Christians imagined their theology.²⁰⁵ In contrast to this, the blues imagination, most common in the rural setting of the Delta, affirmed itself squarely on the deep loss associated with the failed promise of “the promised land” and the chaos of living without a land from which to affirm themselves in the world.

At this juncture, it is important to consider how capitulation to the consumer market situates Afro-Christianity²⁰⁶ about the framework of coloniality. First, it is important to note the difficulty in situating Afro-Christianity about the modernity/coloniality imaginary, established in previous chapters. Afro-Christianity presents a difficulty because of how it performs on either side of the modernity/coloniality imaginary. On one hand, Afro-Christianity is an expression of those people who, as a result of their racialization and marginalization, have been relegated to a type of subaltern space from which they enunciate themselves in the world. On the other hand, as both Hood and Jones indicate, Afro-Christianity has often worked to codify the African cosmic reality and the cosmology of slave religion under the imaged orthodoxy that flows from Judeo-Christian, Greco-Roman, and

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 143. Here, Giggie sets out his assessment of the use of consumerism and its close relation with “spiritual comportment.” Through a close reading of black church newspapers and other literature, Giggie connects the tensions amongst sharecroppers, tenant farmers, and an emergent urban southern based middle class who began to associate particular types of consumer goods with a “sanctified” spiritual identity.

²⁰⁶ Afro-Christianity is used to signify a general religious outlook amongst multiple Christian denominations and congregations amongst the African diaspora.

Eurocentric cosmologies. By recognizing this, Hood and Jones resituate the theological problem at the level of the epistemic. For these thinkers, the question is whether or not the subaltern should reconcile their epistemological underpinnings with those inherent in the Greco-Roman articulation of “God,” or a Western theodicy that fails to consider racialization?

Similarly, the blues hope for the land begs the question of whether or not the “forced context” is viable for mediating revelation of God, as a God of Life. The hope in the “Promised Land,” popularized in slave religion, reflects what we might refer to as the colonial difference²⁰⁷. As a reminder, Mignolo clarifies that the colonial difference or colonial difference(s) are the ways of enunciating the modern/colonial reality.²⁰⁸ Each one of these enunciations speaks from a local history. However, non-European loci of enunciation are also dominated by European expansionism and the project of modernity. With this in mind, slave religion and Afro-Christianity reflect the colonial difference in so far as they decenter the Eurocentric loci of enunciation. Those subjugated under the European cosmovision imagined life worlds in counter distinction from the modern/colonial world and as such articulated cosmovisions. As Mignolo argues about Amerindian loci of enunciation, the subaltern thinks “from the ruins” of their pre-colonial cosmovisions.²⁰⁹ Amongst black American subalterns, the imaging of African Traditional Religions, Islam, and

²⁰⁷ See early explication of the colonial difference in chapters one and two.

²⁰⁸ Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs : Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, 3, 115.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 149.

Christian soteriological motifs provided a basis for a self-organized vision of the world. This vision amounts to, for the most part, a parallel of the colonial difference. However, the shift of Afro-Christianity towards the assumptions that govern the materiality of modernity, that is, especially, the market economy and its consumer goods, seems to place it on the modernity side of the modernity/coloniality imaginary. As Mignolo argues:

The colonial difference is the space where the coloniality of power is enacted. It is also, the space where the restitution of subaltern knowledge is taking place and where border thinking [the alternative to Eurocentrism] is emerging. The colonial difference is the space where local histories [European histories] inventing and implementing global designs [Eurocentrism] meet local histories [non-European histories], the space in which global designs have to be adapted, adopted, rejected, integrated, or ignored....²¹⁰

Mignolo helps us to raise the question of how, or in what way, is Afro-Christianity an “adaptation, adoption, rejection, integration or ignorance” of the Global Design that is Eurocentrism? Such a question emerges from the conditions of coloniality which force people into deep negotiation with the modern world and its global market economy. The irruption of blues music and the reaction to it from the Afro-Christian perspective presents a hermeneutical problem in so far as the fault lines between these two articulations of the colonial difference represent competing ways of adoption, adaptation, rejection integration and ignorance of the global design of Eurocentrism and its Christian cosmology.²¹¹

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Mignolo’s work provincializes ideas of religion and Christianity and understands them as expressions of European local histories. As such they are part and parcel of the “global design” of Eurocentrism. His articulation of the colonial difference(s) situate Christianity as a European cosmology. As such, Mignolo finds the Christian cosmology to be a part of the hegemony that dominates non-Christian local histories. My claim is that Christian cosmology is primarily mediated

From this perspective, it can be argued that black Americans living in the modern/colonial world are not inherently decolonial by their reactions and responses to racialization. Phenotype and ethnic identity do not guarantee one's disposition towards colonialism and coloniality. The history of post-colonial situations across the world reveal that freedom from colonial occupation does not equal freedom from colonial ideology. Race and the colonial division of labor, the two axes of coloniality, outlive the colony and are often employed by the formerly oppressed.²¹² In the U.S., racial distinction has often been overstated by both the racialized and the racist. Both employ race, for better or worse, to affirm them within the market and the nation state. In the contemporary moment, the coloniality

through local histories and is only disposed to hegemony when it claims global epistemic authority and universality. If local histories are allowed to enunciate the meaning of the God of Jesus from their own cosmivision (as was the case with the early Christian communities), then it would seem to follow that Afro-Christianity would fit Mignolo's positive assessment of "border thinking." However, Mignolo chooses, rather, to associate the work of W.E.B Du Bois as representative of his idea of border thinking or thinking from the subaltern perspective of the colonial difference. Such a move is telling of Mignolo's doubts about the potential of a Christianity that speaks from the subaltern colonial difference. My question is how is Du Bois' social-political perspective any more representative of the subaltern colonial difference than that of the blues musicians, black preachers, theologians etc.? Because Du Bois' life experiences were somewhat removed from the local histories that contextualized blues musicians and preachers, it begs the question: Just how revelatory was his idea of double-consciousness? Did double-consciousness really reveal an outlook of the subaltern experience of racialization or did it only express a black American perspective that was neatly situated within the confines of modernity and the global design of Eurocentrism? Such a question can also be raised in relation to Afro-Christianity and its demonization of the blues. Was this a subaltern colonial difference, a translation of Christianity into the life world of the enslaved and formerly enslaved, or was it simply an adoption of the colonial difference and a capitulation to coloniality? Whatever the case, the blues and the visibility of its "arrested development" provides a U.S. perspective on the colonial difference that calls into question the anti-colonial/decolonial outlook of Afro-Christianity and black American intellectuals trained in Western Universities. Mignolo's overdependence on Du Bois as a representative of "border-thinking" leaves his U.S. analysis of the subaltern colonial difference wanting. For more on Du Boisian Eurocentrism and elitism see: Reiland Rabaka, *Against Epistemic Apartheid : W.E.B. Du Bois and the Disciplinary Decadence of Sociology* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2010), 85-87. Robert Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois : Afro-Modern Political Thought in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009). R. Radhakrishnan, "Race and Double Consciousness," *Works and Days* 47/48 24, nos. 1 & 2 (2006). <http://www.worksanddays.net/W&D%202006.html>.

²¹² Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," in *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, 181-83.

of race is most apparent within the many discussions on ethno-racial identity and notions of privilege politics. The irruption of the blues during the Reconstruction offers clues for navigating this moment. The blues is underappreciated for its contributions to political, social, and religious thought precisely because of the dynamics of coloniality, which present opportunities for the racialized to re-racialize themselves in exchange for access to the supposed fruits of modernity. This constant need to construct and leverage racial and ethnic identity as proxies for humanity is fundamentally colonial. This conclusion need not be derived from the work of theoretical inquiry. It is also alive in the life world of everyday people. In the Delta Region, popular politics, religion, spirituality, and the blues give us clues to how peoples are made invisible by modern/colonial imaginations of space. The blues emerges primarily at the level of an intragroup conversation that is traditionally referred to as African American, Negro, or Black America, among others. However, within these large distinctions exists an almost infinite level of diversity. The blues is one strand of this diversity that has often been overlooked precisely because of its peculiar emergence and visibility as a body politic and a musical genre that embarrassed the pious sensibilities of Afro-Christianity. In what follows, the tension between the Afro-Christian imaging of humanity as oriented toward the sacred and its distinction from the blues cosmivision will be explicated further. The implications of this tension are visible in the blues epistemology and how it is employed by blues people to image the body and the sonic. It is to these two contours of the blues cosmology that we now turn.

The Sonic and the Sensual in the Blues Cosmivision

If the space of production is the space shaped by the “forced context,” then the place of production, which is the discursive interpretation of space, finds a repository in the sonic expressions of the blues epistemology. It is through the sonic that blues people signify the space of the Delta as a place. The sonic—music, beat, melody, and lyrics—bears within it questions, critiques, and an epistemic basis for engagement with the Delta Region. For those living in the Delta at the turn of the century, the blues was a refuge and a well of imagination and wonder. The blues, as a cultural production, affirmed a vision of life in spite of the Plantation Regime. With guitars, rhythm, lyrics, moans, shouts and stomping, they signified the Delta *otherwise*. The blues vision of the Delta did not take delight in the iconic “land of cotton” sung about nostalgically in the song, Dixie. Instead, the blues articulated, similar to the spirituals and gospel music, a peoples’ longings from inside the womb of colonialism. Blues music is American and African; Arab and English; Religious and agnostic, traditional and inventive.²¹³ Lyrically, the blues communicates a people’s experience of the “forced context” of the Delta while simultaneously communicating the human desires for meaningful modes of life. It is not only a repository of the

²¹³ The interpretation of blues music has often been viewed as an African retention of storytelling, rhythm, tonality and communal call and response. These retentions are usually understood as taking on a new shape in the conditions of enslavement and European expansionism. Under these dynamics various cultural productions were produced such as the blues, jazz, the spirituals, salsa, calypso, and the dozens amongst others. However, allegiance to constructs of whiteness and blackness have often produced racialized essentialisms that stifle more fluid interpretations of the music. Gerhard Kubik is one of the first to interpret the Blues from a trans-Atlantic perspective. His work uncovers relationships between American blues and existing African musical traditions. Kubik recognized that the pentatonic scale is shared in both blues music and many West African styles. However, Kubik adds that West African musical styles are also imposed upon by the presence of the Ottoman Empire, Arab-Islamic music, stringed instruments, and singing. For more, see: Kubik, *Africa and the Blues*, 81, 94.

resistant spirit of political and economic autonomy concerned with the means of production, as Woods primarily contends, but an affirmation of the sensual enfleshed²¹⁴ and embodied ways of knowing the reality. The blues is also both communal and individual, as such, it continues a memory of the African tradition of call and response, but enriches it with lessons learned from the individuated experiences of the levee camps, sharecropping, sexual relationships, and bad fortune. The wisdom in the blues was created from individuated experiences that defied the confines of the secular and profane notions of the reality suggested by the Afro-Christian cosmivision.

As they countered the Afro-Christian cosmivision, blues people acknowledged that thinking with the Hebrew Bible and the world of First Century Palestine in the Gospels was not enough to confront the complexities of life. The Bible based piety of black Protestantism provided little solace to people longing to fulfill their desire for uninhibited sensual love and romantic relationships. The precarious conditions of life that left black Americans trapped under the domination of the Plantation Regime exacerbated the desire for sensual and romantic love. Unlike the rituals of Afro-Christianity, which promised earthly and heavenly

²¹⁴ By enfleshed, here, I mean to recall the earlier discussion of Sylvia Wynter on the flesh and the overrepresentation of man. If we recall, she discusses the problem of the Christian idea of "man" imaged as Spirit/Flesh. She argues that this spirit/Flesh idea of man takes on new meaning in modernity when it is set up as the universal relationship that makes up human subjectivity. Wynter argues that the discursive processes of signifying Eurocentric subjectivity in counter distinction from the subjectivity of indigenous peoples required a hegemonic construction of racialized being with the Spirit/Flesh representing the most evolved mode of being. As such, the distinction of Christian images of the body from indigenous images of the body provide a basis for the transition for the secular rationalist being of modernity. These two forms of being work by over-representing these images as universally applicable to all times and spaces. For this reason, she calls for a decolonial abandonment of the Spirit/Flesh and secular rationality as options for subalterns to affirm their visions for life. See: Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/ Freedom: Towards the Human, after Man, Its Overrepresentation-- an Argument," 278-79.

rewards in exchange for sexual restraint and moral fortitude, the blues provided an outlet for Delta peoples to confront the visceral effects of what the “environment” demanded of their bodies.²¹⁵ Blues performers and virtuosi openly sang about their bodily desires and how the conditions of the plantation economy impeded their ability to maintain loving relationships. The honesty implicit in both blues lyrics and the sensuality of the blues music was unapologetic and was often seen by more “sensible” Afro-Christians as an impediment to the “uplifting the black race.” In defiance of this Afro-Christian sensibility, blues performers and virtuosi drew Saturday Night audiences that sometimes rivaled Sunday Morning Church audiences.²¹⁶ In the post–enslavement world, sexual repression was harnessed by the black uplift movement as an effort to construct a “civil” group identity for black Americans. Modern architects of civility worked hard to associate “civil” sexuality with monogamy, patriarchy, heteronormativity, and marriage. The idea of the body within this cosmovision offered little flexibility to peoples moving from plantation to plantation looking for work and sustainable lives. Nor was it flexible enough to handle the diversity inherent in how people envisioned their sexuality in the post-enslavement reality. With this in mind, the blues can be considered, among other things, as a repository or a commentary on post-enslavement sensuality in the Delta.

There are three major ideas that drive this discussion on blues and sensuality. The first is attention to the sensual as a source of knowledge. Along these lines, the blues will be examined as a phenomenon that reflects on an embodied

²¹⁵ Murray, *Stomping the Blues*, 20.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 197.

experience of the Delta space. Second, the blues will be seen as an emergent decolonizing activity that reimages gender, sex, and sexuality. The third and final idea is the blues notion of the body as an alternative to the nature grace dynamic espoused within the Afro-Christian reception of Protestant theology. With these ideas in mind, the aim is to reveal the blues and its vision for life as a trans-cultural²¹⁷ activity that embraces the body and cultural production as loci for engaging the “forced context.”

Sensuality and Embodiment in the Blues

Sensuality is integral to blues music. Scholarship on the blues has often focused on the written communication of the sensual by highlighting the sexual references in blues lyrics. However, as Murray notes, blues music is “dance music”

²¹⁷By trans-racial I mean to denote the move towards a new basis of humanity that recognizes systemic racism but focuses on the activity of thinking and relating to the world in ways that do not reify race. Trans-racial movements are aimed at the coloniality of race and not the post-modern idea of the racial metanarrative. Trans-racial thought of Paul Gilroy, Anibal Quijano and others recognizes that there are moments in cultural production, such as the blues, where racial ideology/ontology are not seen as the only option for life. Blues practitioners in their production of music and epistemology are always aware of the conditions determined by the colonial project of racialization. However, their production of culture makes a move away from the racial construction of the self and towards the sonic, the sensual and the land. The blues vision of life speaks from the colonial wound that is the post-Reconstruction environment. As a part of the coloniality of power, race is a colonial cultural phenomenon that produces the violent “forced context” or the colonial difference from the perspective of the subaltern. From the decolonial perspective, race, even when positively employed by the marginalized, represents an extension of the colonial European “differencing” projects. Mignolo refers to this phenomenon as a “global design,” or the extension of European colonial histories into global arrangements. Global designs, then need not be dependent on the will of the European colonizer. The European *will*, or as Wynter notes, the idea of “Man” establishes itself by force and imposes itself as “universally human.” Racialized being similar to the barbarian, the savage, and the peasant which proceeds it, is meant to establish an opposing ontology to the ideal of Eurocentric “Man.” Subalterns are faced with the supposed “choice” of “be-coming” some revised notion of “Man” that establishes itself within the boundaries of “racialized” existence. For this reason, this dissertation understands racial ontology even in its positive arrangements of “racial pride” or “black humanism” as projects that offer little option for life beyond an assimilation to the ideas (specifically race and racialization) that govern coloniality. For Gilroy’s take on the transcultural see: Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, *Wellek Library Lectures* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 8.

and is written to inspire the body to move. The reader should keep this point in mind because of the limitations of the written language to communicate hands, hips, feet, torsos, pelvic regions and their deep communication with the sonic output of pianos, voices, guitars, and drums. Murray reminds that the blues is not the music of the concert hall, but the music of the dance hall.²¹⁸ The space of production, in this case the dance hall, is always operative and determining the image of the body, its relation to the world, and what it senses, although not in a totalizing fashion. Blues sensuality, then, is partially a confrontation with the Delta Region. It is not simply the mind and body at work in an abstract fashion, but space at work on the mind and the body and the relations amongst space, mind, and body. With the picture of both the blues performance and the space of production in mind, sensuality and embodiment point towards the emergent blues cosmivision that is always in the process of being limited by coloniality. To borrow Murray's distinction, "the blues as such," is the signification of "low spirits," produced by the domination of the plantation economy.

Blues music is a commentary on and a response to "the blues as such" which are often personified or spiritualized. Bessie Smith illustrates this point in her performance of "In the House Blues," and Ida Cox does the same in her performance of "Rambling Blues" (see song index for full lyrics). In both of these songs, "the blues as such," is a "supernatural persona." When sung and performed, these songs gave "the blues as such" materiality; the blues as such could, run, speak, walk, talk, and smile. "The blues as such" was also seen as a spiritual entity that could take over a

²¹⁸ Murray, *Stomping the Blues*, 182.

person's body leaving them sick, addicted to alcohol and drugs, or riddled with depression so deep that it seemed that only relief would be death.²¹⁹ It would be a mistake to interpret the personification and spiritualization of the blues as *merely* a reactionary reflection and not also an artistic expression of hyperbole in the face of audiences longing to hear and feel the experience of facing "the blues as such." Nevertheless, it is important to note how the personification and spiritualization of "the blues as such" mediated the depths of the experience of domination and the deep loss associated with living life on the margins of the plantation economy. The blues as such, was a force, entity, and a spirit, that had to be reckoned with, named, and Murray makes note of this when he writes,

What the blue devils of gloom [the blues as such] and ultimate despair threaten is not the soul or the possibility of everlasting salvation after death, but the *quality of everyday life on earth*. Thus, *the most immediate problem* of the blues-bedeveled person concerns his ability to cope with even *the commonplace*. What is at stake is a sense of wellbeing that is at least strong enough to enable him to meet the basic requirements of the workday world. Accordingly, in addition to its concern with forthright confrontation and expurgation, the Saturday Night Function *also* consists of *rituals of resilience and perseverance* through improvisation in the face of capricious disjuncture.²²⁰ [Emphasis is mine.]

Murray's recognition of the "commonplace" of the "blue devils of gloom" does not signify a life experience held in common across all persons living in the modern world. Instead, he is referring to what is common for those living on the margins of the modern world, those seen as the commodified means of modernity. The word "Blues," then, is a people's way of naming their afflictions and giving them symbolic

²¹⁹ Ibid., 16.

²²⁰ Ibid., 42.

expression such that the community can avoid, confront, play with, remember, and, in some cases, forget the pain of affliction. As Angela Davis notes, the blues naming process is significant primarily because of its role in the life of the community.²²¹ While blues as music captures an individual's experience or stylization of hard times, it serves a larger purpose that goes beyond any one individual. Davis notes that through the singing and performance of blues:

...menacing problems are ferreted out from the isolated individual experience and restructured as problems shared by the community. As shared problems, threats can be met and addressed within a public and collective context.²²²

The activity of naming and coping with the physical and psychological problems that shape the "common place" were and still are imperative for life and survival. The blues cosmology gave meaning and shape to the many events that evoked "the blues as such" and gave local peoples a consciousness that what they were experiencing was more entangled than simple misfortune.

Naming the "blues as such" does not tell the whole story of sensuality and embodiment. Giving the blues materiality was also coupled with giving meaning to the bodies that were threatened by the blues. These bodies, as Murray notes, were susceptible to more than eternal damnation pivoted on their ability to resist and avoid temptation. The blues body that is those bodies that sensed, recognized and confronted "the blues as such," was represented in ways that outstripped the Christian notion of the body. Songs such as Funny Paper Smith's, "Fool's Blues" (see

²²¹ Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism : Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*, 54.

²²² *Ibid.*, 33.

song index), make light of conditions of life that seem to outstrip the powers of the Jesus praised in Negro Spirituals. In the performance of the song, Smith questions the power of “Jesus Christ” as a liberating power when he sings:

You know it must be the devil I’m servin’,
I know it can’t be Jesus Christ ...
`Cause I ask him to save me and look like he tryin’ to take my life.²²³

While some interpret these lyrics as an example of the sacred/secular binary, the argument proposed here is that these lyrics are a critique of the Afro-Christian adoption of the sacred/secular binary. Songs like this articulated “the blues as such.” The blues people that sang and listened to these songs imaged a material experience that was not, by their knowledge, the object of the redemptive powers of the Christian God and Jesus. The experience of the blues was unique in that it challenged the cosmology of good, evil, and sin. In Afro-Christianity, these categories were employed to mobilize a black led civilizing mission which attempted to associate “the blues as such” as resultant from a lack of personal responsibility, licentiousness, sin, and other notions of individual culpability. In this way, Afro-Christianity rejected the blues notion that the “blues as such” outstripped the cosmic understanding of evil and, therefore, presented a challenge to the eschatology of redemptive suffering.

The many stories of sexual and romantic relationships going wrong in blues music characterizes this feeling of “the blues as such” that is often too carnal for the pious sensibilities of Afro-Christian pastoral concern. Blues people constantly faced the low-spirits that stemmed from sexual/romantic relationships gone wrong.

²²³ As found in Oliver, *Blues Fell This Morning : Meaning in the Blues*, 118.

Romantic relationships often failed as a result of the poor life conditions of the plantation economy. Sex in the blues imagination was not an embarrassment or a carnal desire that alienated human beings from the promise of eternal life. Viewed from the long history of enslavement, sex for blues people was a reclamation of the humanity that was repressed and manipulated by the masters and mistresses of enslavement. However, this reclamation was constantly arrested and challenged. As blues commentators note, the post-War South was just as brutal on sexual/romantic relationships as were the brutalities of enslavement. Disease, migration, death, imprisonment, and poverty were almost constant and provided little room for the development of the ideals of monogamy and sexual chastity promoted by black American religious institutions and their mobilization of Victorian ideals of manhood and womanhood.²²⁴ These ideals were part and parcel of American Protestantism and civil religion. Blues music provided a way of naming the deep feeling of loss associated with the inability of achieving stable romantic relationships. Songs like “Death Letter Blues,” performed by Ida B. Cox, spoke to the constancy of death that befell women and men living and working in the levee, turpentine and lumber camps. Untimely death often separated lovers. If it was not death, it was the fluctuations in the labor market that led to the separation of romantic lovers and families.²²⁵

Traveling women and men untethered to the demands of monogamy, sexual prowess (both female and male), domestic violence, infidelity, retaliation against

²²⁴ Harrison, *Black Pearls : Blues Queens of the 1920s*, 68-69. See also: Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism : Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*, 22-24.

²²⁵ Harrison, *Black Pearls : Blues Queens of the 1920s*, 74-75.

wayward lovers, and homosexuality are common themes in the blues. These themes suggest a desire for an embodied life free from debilitating sexual repression caused both by the conditions of the “forced context” as well as the civilizing mission adopted by the Afro-Christian community.²²⁶ The appeals to “uplift,” advancement, and Christian conversion placed demands on bodies that were just establishing themselves beyond the oppression of enslavement. It is within these entanglements of race, advancement, and the many ills of marginal life that the blues cosmivision becomes *arrested*²²⁷, to borrow Clyde Woods’ expression. By placing these brief reflections of sensuality and the blues back into conversation with decolonial discourse, what follows will further highlight the signifying power of the blues. In this effort, the aim is to recover the blues gnosis such that it may once again assist us in naming the psychic and physical problems continually repressed by the reification of Eurocentric racial and sexual identity.

The Blues, the Sensual, and Trans-Racial Body Politics

As a reminder, the blues is primarily understood here as an activity rather than an identity. Our evoking of Baraka’s “Blues people” is aimed at recognizing peoples that think with the blues.²²⁸ The emphasis on blues people is one expression of trans-racial thinking in that blues provides an activity that decenters the colonial

²²⁶ Ibid., 95-96; Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism : Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*, 8, 19.

²²⁷ Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism : Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*, 42-45. For more on Woods’ idea of “development arrested” see: Woods, *Development Arrested : The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta*, 21.

²²⁸ The reader should note that my use of “blues people” while drawing from Baraka is ultimately distinct from his use of it as an appeal to describe the essence of black American identity. My use of it is more related to those people that participate in the activity of making blues music, and identifying “the blues as such.”

activity of identity formation as a basis for leveraging one's racial, ethnic, or gender group into positions of power which allow them to participate in the global market economy. Of course, blues people often leverage the blues identity or "blues aesthetic" for the receipt of capital as well. Nevertheless, the blues people still reflect an emergent trans-racial thinking that endeavors to speak of life beyond an ideology of race and its categorizing effects. These categorizing effects work to codify persons into representations of anti-humanity and ideal humanity necessary for the perpetuation of coloniality. Anti-humanity connotes the deficit starting point that relegates subaltern subjects within the modern/colonial world. Ideal humanity connotes the Eurocentric pure universal form of being (and its analogues) that embraces rational being as the highest evolutionary achievement.²²⁹

As a result of the imposition of anti-humanity and ideal humanity, the subaltern body, from the perspective of modernity, is always in need of "development" respective to the time/space continuum of Western progressivism. Trans-raciality, the racial component of Mignolo's process of decoloniality²³⁰, and Dussel's trans-modernity²³¹, recognize that *humanity is determined not through ideology but through the activity of relating to the world*. Blues performance and the naming of the reality of "the blues as such" is but one example of this activity of *relating*. The decolonial perspective recognizes that western ideology and the project of producing discursive identities as representations of "progress" are re-inscriptions

²²⁹ Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," in *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, 199-200; 02-04.

²³⁰ Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity : Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, 58.

²³¹ Dussel, Krauel, and Tuma, "Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism," 474-75. See also: Enrique Dussel, "'World System and 'Trans'-Modernity'," *Nepantla: Views from South* 3, no. 2 (2002).

of the colonial idea and the ideal of classification. Classification of the races is a performance of rationality which sets modernity in motion. Classification is not for classification sake but performed as a means of controlling the division of labor and setting European modernity as a natural “way out” of “primitive” existence.

Mignolo’s decolonial adage, “I am where I think,”²³² speaks to the problem of Eurocentric rationality and its tactic of classifying the races. His adage recognizes that the problem of Eurocentric rationality is its disregard for locality and how it informs human thinking.

Locality, from this perspective, is not about a slavish allegiance to a contextual essence or an essential rootedness, but the activity of checking universality with an attention to time and space. “I am where I think,” is in counter distinction from a modern rationality that sets up *discursive universal constructs* as the soil to be inhabited by all humanity. Here lies the fundamental problem with the dynamics of theological considerations of revelation.²³³ There is to date little theological consideration for the epistemological differences between those (here, read as blues people) who are subject to the imposition of Christian revelation and those who bear witness to it within the Biblical text. The erasure of this difference is caught up in the appeal to a universality that constructs the globe in its own image. Such a problem is not only germane to theological discourse, but also secular or existential discourses that identify all religious thought, especially non-European religions, as absent of or lacking rationality. Hearing the blues then requires, as

²³² Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity : Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, xvi.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 80-98.

Gerald Boodoo has argued, a type of eclecticism that modestly draws from many epistemological discourses to make more humble reflections rather than universal claims. It is to this eclecticism in the analysis of the emergent body politic of blues people in the Delta Region that I now turn.

Towards a Blues Body Politic: Modernity/Coloniality and the Critique of “Man”

Most, if not all of the body politics of modernity (those politics that govern male and female forms and their various discursive projections as family, man, woman, child), pivot on the idea of separating the reality into binary relationships: secular and sacred, Heaven and Hell, angelic and demonic, sacred and profane. In the project of modernity, the idea of race determined these relationships to a great extent. Race was used to represent the cosmological opposite of the sacred and in the secular notion of modernity, it is used to represent the opposite of reason.²³⁴ As such, race as an ideology works to “fix” the biogenetic, “skin colors” into a binary cosmic relationship of white and non-white. According to Wynter, this relationship perceived via Christian cosmology represented subaltern non-white existence as beyond the representation of humanity as Spirit/Flesh. Further, subaltern cultural productions which affirm sensual and sexual autonomy are understood as insurgent, or hedonistic because they disrupted the bio-cosmic order that hierarchically relates “Man” to its negation racialized inhumanity.

²³⁴ Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," in *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, 203.

Dismantling “Flesh” as a Decolonial Act

Blues people and their relation to the world through the sensual and the sonic offer an option for dismantling the colonial use of the Spirit/Flesh. Such a thesis recognizes that the dynamics of sensing is that which precedes the Christian discursive notion of the Spirit/Flesh as the symbol of rational humanity. One must *know what flesh* signifies in order to sin or choose to “walk after the flesh.”²³⁵ Subaltern existence from the perspective of the Eurocentric colonial difference pre-determined that only a Eurocentric epistemic could provide a basis for indigenous peoples (in the Americas and from Africa) to achieve rationality and recognize themselves “properly” as Spirit/Flesh. The blues people’ recognition of “a low-spirit,” posits *something else* in the way of “living after the Spirit.” The human condition of “having the blues,” was unanticipated by the Spirit/Flesh representation of the human *being*. As Afro-Christianity in the post –Reconstruction reality looked to legitimate the black “race” as respectable citizens of state and church, they employed the Spirit/Flesh as a means of legitimating the black body. The Afro-Christian Spirit/Flesh required a conversion, a redemption from the irrational mode of humanity represented by some of the elements of slave religion and the blues cosmivision. This colonial outlook is especially seen within the tensions between the blues sexuality and the sexual repression tactics of the Afro-

²³⁵ Romans 8:5 Some biblical scholars note that this Pauline reference to the incommensurability of flesh and spirit is likely due to the influence of Stoicism on Paul’s thought. Nevertheless, in the modern world the dichotomy of flesh and spirit was used as the foundation for rationality. Troels Engberg-Pedersen, “Stoicism in the Apostle Paul: A Philosophical Reading,” in *Stoicism : Traditions and Transformations*, ed. Steven K. Strange and Jack Zupko (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 61-62; Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul in His Hellenistic Context, Studies of the New Testament and Its World* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 21-22.

Christian civilizing mission. The title of this section, “Dismantling Flesh as a Decolonial Act,” is prefigured in how the blues cosmivision is distinguishable from the Afro-Christian representation of humanity. In particular, the blues takes up a positive view of the flesh in its embrace and celebration of the body through dance, sensuality and sexuality. Nevertheless, the negative view of flesh taken up in Afro-Christianity as a civilizing tactic militates against the blues embrace of the flesh and prematurely renders it sinful. Murray highlights the negative view of flesh in Afro-Christian churches when he writes:

The church is not concerned with the affirmation of life as such, which in its view is only a matter of feeble flesh to begin with...Unlike the revelers of the Saturday Night Dance Function [where blues music is played] the worshipers attending the Sunday morning Service are very concerned with guilt and seeking forgiveness for their trespasses... what each [worshiper] expresses is not affirmation of life as such but rather his determination not to yield to the enticements of the fleshpots of Baal.²³⁶

Murray’s point is that blues people embrace their bodies and view their sensuality as permissible and not a slippery slope of temptation. Now, this permissible understanding of the sensual was not relegated in a binary way. Many people participated in both the Saturday Night Dance Function and the Sunday Morning Service. While these dual participants likely represented their participation in the Saturday Night Dance Function as a trespass against God, their desire to participate in both points toward a cosmic understanding of the body that disrupts the dichotomous understanding of the Spirit/Flesh that represents the body as an impediment to salvation.²³⁷ Blues then responds to the coloniality of sexuality,

²³⁶ Murray, *Stomping the Blues*, 38.

²³⁷ Ibid.

sensuality, and embodiment that give us insights for how we might rethink the body beyond the hegemony of the Spirit/Flesh.

In his text, *The Sexual Demon and Colonial Power: Pan African Embodiment and Erotic Schemes of Empire*, Greg Thomas, drawing on insights from Sylvia Wynter, provides some further insight into this point. Thomas critiques scholars that some associate with the anti-colonial tradition of thought. My argument extends this insight to the blues notion of the sensual. Significant for our discussion is his argument concerning Angela Davis and Clara Jones. Thomas raises several critical concerns with how these thinkers interpret sexuality and gender dynamics amongst enslaved and emancipated black Americans. It should be said at the outset, that the works of Angela Davis and Clara Jones are already non-normative texts because of their primary purpose in movement struggles against imperialism. Davis' article on the topic and Clara Jones' book length work take up positions that can already be considered insurgent or queer by western standards of scholarship on the topic. However, Thomas' point is to push them further and away from the Eurocentric matrix of sex, gender, and sexuality.

Thomas bases his argument on Sylvia Wynter's "coloniality of being" and Toni Cade Bambara, who declared in her 1970's article, "On the Issue of Roles," that Eurocentric masculinity and femininity were understood, by at least some of the enslaved, as a type of "madness."²³⁸ From Bambara's idea of "madness," Thomas

²³⁸ Toni Cade Bambara, "On the Issue of Roles " in *The Black Woman: An Anthology*, ed. Toni Cade Bambara (New York: Mentor 1970), 102.

constructs a decolonial activity for a new way of engaging sexuality. To this point, he writes:

...to resist the erotic schemes of colonial and neo-colonial power, the controlling categories of masculinity and femininity, heterosexuality, and homosexuality must be exploded beyond belief.²³⁹

How Thomas comes to this conclusion is worth explicating since sexuality is not squarely considered in what we have discussed thus far as coloniality. In pointing to Bambara's idea of "madness" to describe the colonial gender roles, Thomas signifies a subaltern view and critique of the Eurocentric gendered self. Alternatively, Bambara draws on Frantz Fanon's notion of the "constant invention of self" and posits that a primary (of course there were others) representation and embodiment of selfhood for the *enslaved* was "the revolutionary self."²⁴⁰ With Bambara's claim of the "madness" of masculinity and femininity as an analytical tool Thomas sets out to critique Angela Davis' readings of the enslaved and their sexual relationships. In effect, Thomas accuses Angela Davis of uncritically assuming "womanhood" as a redeemable idea that could be recast and reshaped by the revolutionary efforts of enslaved and post-emancipation black Americans. Davis, Thomas argues, "assumes" a redeemed womanhood recast beyond Victorian ideals when she writes, "Black women were women indeed."²⁴¹ Evoking Wynter, Thomas argues that Davis' "womanhood" is the female modality of the Renaissance and humanist production of

²³⁹ Greg Thomas, *The Sexual Demon of Colonial Power : Pan-African Embodiment and Erotic Schemes of Empire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 128.

²⁴⁰Bambara, "On the Issue of Roles," in *The Black Woman: An Anthology*, 109.

²⁴¹ Thomas, *The Sexual Demon of Colonial Power : Pan-African Embodiment and Erotic Schemes of Empire*, 28.

“Man” as the generic for humanity.²⁴² The question Thomas raises is very close to the question begged by the historical record of blues women: To what ideal of womanhood does the black female orient her existence? Is it a premodern European womanhood, a pre-modern African womanhood, the womanhood of the slave-mistress, or a new activity of being female altogether? According to Thomas, neither of these forms of womanhood are clearly embraced by Davis. The third of the four options, pre-Modern African womanhood, is explicitly abandoned by Davis because of her position that West African forms of matrifocality would not have been realizable in contexts dominated by slave masters and mistresses.²⁴³ Thomas, following the thought of Clara Jones, contends that Davis misses an opportunity to recognize the memory of matrifocal West African conceptions of femaleness as a basis for the construction of the “revolutionary self.”

Clara Jones, similar to Davis, attempts to show how enslaved and formerly enslaved women disassemble the colonial idea of womanhood. Jones’ move adopts West African notions of being female specifically because of their understanding of the female’s role in regards to property. Jones clarifies this when she writes:

Most of the Negro people brought to these shores by slave traders came from West Africa where the position of women, based on active participation in property control, was relatively higher in the family than that of European women.²⁴⁴

²⁴²Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/ Freedom: Towards the Human, after Man, Its Overrepresentation-- an Argument," 262.

²⁴³ Thomas, *The Sexual Demon of Colonial Power : Pan-African Embodiment and Erotic Schemes of Empire*, 33. For Angela Davis’ statement on this in context see: Angela Davis, "Reflections on Black Woman's Roles in the Community of Slaves," in *A Turbulent Voyage : Readings in African American Studies*, ed. Floyd W. Hayes (San Diego, Calif.: Collegiate Press, 2000).

²⁴⁴ Claudia Jones, "An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!," in *Let Nobody Turn Us Around : Voices of Resistance, Reform, and Renewal : An African American Anthology*, ed. Manning Marable and Leith Mullings (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 318.

For Thomas, Clara Jones' reading is distinct from Davis' in that she recognizes the need to move beyond a Eurocentric ideal of womanhood by reclaiming the West African understanding of woman. To this point, Thomas writes:

A precolonial continental circumstance supplies the major source of explanation in Jones's militant work, an absolute rarity in more established historiographies of African enslavement in the U.S.²⁴⁵

With these words, Thomas makes his point that most historiographies of enslavement, while recognizing the pathologies associated with the domination of black African males and females, find little if any surviving qualities from indigenous cultures of Africa. For Thomas, the revolutionary self, must find some way of affirming personhood that speaks to a trans-Atlantic experience of the world.

Moving beyond Davis, Thomas indicts Debra Gray White and her book length text *Ar'n't I a Woman: Female Slaves in the American South*. Thomas critiques Gray's use of matrifocality as a descriptor of black American culture. According to Thomas, her use of matrifocality posits does not get beyond the binary of patriarchal (male dominated) and matriarchal (female dominated) ideologies. Gray White's attention to focus disrupts the power differential between women and men but maintains the heterosexual binary of patrilineal and matrilineal. Gray White reflects this most explicitly when she writes:

While it would seem that the antebellum slave woman had little in common with her African foremother, motherhood was still the black girl's most important rite of passage and mothers were still the most central figures in the black family.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵ Thomas, *The Sexual Demon of Colonial Power : Pan-African Embodiment and Erotic Schemes of Empire*, 32.

²⁴⁶ Deborah G. White, *Ar'n't I a Woman? : Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 1985), 108.

With this, White warns that “matrifocal” is a means to get beyond a power dynamic between black male and female enslaved. “Matrifocal,” for White signifies women centered family, but primarily around the idea of motherhood or mothering. White sees matrifocality, rather than matriarchy (female power over and against male power), as a tactic to resist the negative Moynihanian pathologizing of black culture as riddled with female dominated pathology.²⁴⁷ Despite these caveats, Thomas still finds White’s appropriation of the matrifocal to be substantively the same as the colonial notions of gender and sexuality which impose heterosexuality and patriarchy as the generic for all humanity.²⁴⁸

This brief journey through Thomas helps display how critiques of modern ideology and identity, in this case, womanhood, are not necessarily anti-colonial. The option of Fanon’s invention²⁴⁹ harnessed by Wynter, Thomas, Bambara, and Jones reflects an acknowledgement and a call to move beyond the futility of formulaic identities that only re-inscribe the foundational colonialism. This

²⁴⁷ “The Moynihan Report” as it has been deemed in critical discourse was originally entitled *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*. The report was written and researched by sociologist Daniel Patrick Moynihan who argued that the problems with the black community stemmed from the centrality and importance of women amongst the enslaved and the post-enslavement communities of black Americans. Matriarchy, Moynihan argued, among other things, was causally related to the poor socio-economic and political plight of the Negro family. For more on the report and its context, see: Douglas S. Massey et al., *The Moynihan Report Revisited : Lessons and Reflections after Four Decades, Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2009).

²⁴⁸ Thomas, *The Sexual Demon of Colonial Power : Pan-African Embodiment and Erotic Schemes of Empire*, 45.

²⁴⁹ Fanon’s idea of invention refers to the activity of inventing one’s self constantly in order to avoid the subjugation of the imposed ontologies and stereotypes of the colonial epistemologies. Fanon sees the inventive both as a form of revolutionary political resistance and an ongoing activity of decolonization. For more on this see: Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 204; Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1967), 59.

movement beyond identity reflects Mignolo's call for "decoloniality."²⁵⁰

Decoloniality is an activity of thought and creativity that recognizes and pushes beyond the boundary of European assumptions about the world and how human bodies inhabit their images of the world. With decolonial sexuality in mind, the blues emerges as people's recognition of the limitation of modern rationality as a basis for articulating meaning. Womanhood and manhood are not given articulations of embodied knowing, rather, they are manifestations of modern/colonial culture. As such, they are integral to the project of Occidentalism as discussed in the first chapter.²⁵¹

To conclude this analysis of blues sensuality, we will once again engage Wynter and her specific treatment of the Spirit/Flesh duality. Wynter asserts that the Spirit/flesh binary is central in how the Christian Missionary understood "human *be-ing*." As such, it is integral to what she considers as the "coloniality of being" or the European colonial difference, which is the way in which European colonialist imaged themselves in counter distinction from the natives. It is the missionary and the conquistador who are manifestations of Spirit/Flesh. In the same way that Bambara recognized the "madness" of masculinity and femininity, so too can we imagine that the "natural" representation of the human as Spirit/Flesh was, too, a type of madness from the perspective of the enslaved African and the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean and the Americas. It is in these colonial outlooks that the outsider, natives, and Africans who have different notions of the human, are

²⁵⁰ Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity : Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, 58.

²⁵¹ See Chapter One 17-21

interpreted, via the Christian cosmivision, as lacking the humanity. As a result, they are excluded from the Spirit/Flesh representation of humanity. Rather than being born with “the proclivity to sin,” as a result of a fallen flesh, they were simply fallen altogether with no redeeming qualities. Under the Christian cosmivision, the natives were humanoid forms that lacked a cultural and epistemological predisposition to redemption. Conversion provided the only remedy to this depraved state. However, their conversion did not only require turning toward “the Spirit” but turning toward a rationality that deemed the Spirit/Flesh as representative of humanity itself. Subalterns, who engage rather than suppress their bodies decenter the rationality that would require that they incarnate themselves in the “Spirit/Flesh” of the Eurocentric Christian imagination. Blues people that participate in a body affirming cosmology dismantles the rationality inherent in the “Spirit/Flesh” dichotomy. Such a move is reflective of an emergent decoloniality and an activity of asserting a vision of the body and its respective relationships. The blues people’ image of their bodies is chronicled in the activity of singing, playing, improvising, and dancing the blues. These activities, at their best, exist within the simplicity of everyday life and speak to the deep loss experienced by the peoples of the Delta Region. What goes scarcely attempted in much of U.S. scholarship on the experience of racialization and sexualization of the enslaved—and by extension their “free” descendants—is a critical appreciation of the Delta Region and its knowledge(s) that speak beyond the optics of racial being and identity. A critical appreciation, as Greg Thomas intimates, does not suggest *inclusion* into the normative identities of modernity. Nor, as argued above, does it require an

adoption of Greco-Roman, Judeo-Christian or European rationalities. Instead, appreciation requires that one leave behind both the colonial identities and the knowledges that undergird them.

Afro-Christianity and its adoption of sanctified womanhood and manhood for the purpose of political unity and Christian piety, while pragmatically motivated, risks becoming the vehicle by which the global design of Occidentalism extends its influence. The extension of this influence operates at many levels. We have seen it here at the level of making meaning of male and female humanity. Economic and political projects have much to teach us about how people are denied access to the basic needs of life and the fruits of the earth. However, these projects in their targeted focus on politics and economics often proceed as if the knowledge wars between religion and the Enlightenment are only approached by Marx, Freud, Hegel, Foucault, or Derrida or any other European based critic of modernity. This myopia is why many U.S. theologies of liberation still adopt Eurocentric critiques of capitalism, structuralism, heteronormativity, patriarchy and race as the primary interlocutors for revising the theological imagination. What has been understated in those theologians who use these critiques is how the critiques themselves are dependent on Occidentalist assumptions about the world. It should come as no surprise that these assumptions appear to the subaltern as a type of “madness.” Ironically, it was a “madness” to which many felt forced to assimilate. The recognition of Eurocentrism via sexuality and Christian pietism is not purely pejorative, but a recognition that both Eurocentric domination and its revision by Europeans are expressions of local histories, albeit globalized local histories. The subaltern, and in

our case blues people, experience this globalization, as Mignolo writes, from their local histories or loci of enunciation.²⁵²

The cultural production of the blues and its contribution to knowledge production provides one way of taking seriously the meaning making projects that rival the Global Design of Eurocentrism expressed in the plantation economy of the Delta Region. In so far as a manhood and womanhood are dislocated, so too is the conflation of these tropes as indicators of Christian conversion that operate along the manipulation of the Pauline ideal of “walking after the Spirit.” Those Christian communities in the U.S. that are still predominately divided along cultural differences poorly coded as white and black are indicators that the misappropriation of the Spirit/Flesh is not a trans-cultural identity. Rather, this appropriation of Christian identity is mediated through Eurocentric culture and, as such, is also mediated through the epistemic entanglements of the modern/colonial world. I propose that a way forward is not to construct a *more* progressive or redeemed black identity. Rather, I contend that a way forward engages those cosmovisions that have been “arrested” by coloniality. Such a move seeks to bring to a close the Eurocentric identity game—a game that many from decolonial thought think is the game that the Occidentalists want us to play.²⁵³ How can we change this game that keeps those of us with histories on the darker side of modernity from shape shifting into colonial identities in hopes of recognition, legitimation, and acceptance by those who perpetuate the *madness* that is modernity?

²⁵² Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs : Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, 5.

²⁵³ Marta Lamas, *Feminism : Transmissions and Retransmissions*, translated by John Pluecker, 1st ed., *Theory in the World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 27,46.

These questions, with an eye towards a theological alternative, is what the remainder of this dissertation takes up. The blues people and their episteme call for this alternative in so far as their vision for life presses on, not with Universalist claims about their identity, but with an openness to a life of constant openness and “invention.” This invention is not an arbitrary activity taken up for the sake of personal creativity but one that characterizes what it means to survive within the Delta Region and its particular expression of coloniality. Literary artist, James Baldwin, reflected the mood of the blues when he described what he saw as a “toughness” in the blues.²⁵⁴ On the blues body can be read an attitude, a posture and an aesthetic that is *tough enough* to confront the circumstances of the Plantation Regime (the colonial difference) and creatively make meaning. That the blues is *tough enough* does not signify that it is naturally “better” than the Afro-Christian cosmivision. Rather, it recognizes that blues people, who became synonymous with “the Devil,” might have learned something—ironically by flirting with “the Devil” imposed upon them.

²⁵⁴ James Baldwin and Randall Kenan, *The Cross of Redemption : Uncollected Writings*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010), 70.

Conclusion

What this chapter has endeavored to do is provide a basis from which to understand how the Afro-Christian perspective used the blues people as a representation of “walking after the flesh and not the Spirit.” We have done this by articulating the blues vision of the sensual, the sonic, and the land, three contours of the blues cosmovision. With the contours of the blues cosmovision in mind, the intra-racial optic reveals that the Afro-Christian demonization of blues people was yet another mobilization of Eurocentric rationality. This capitulation to Eurocentric rationality and cosmovision uncritically adopted the hegemonic Spirit/Flesh identity without adequate recognition of its complicit role in the domination of culture. Afro-Christianity claimed a race based inclusion in the Spirit/Flesh representation of humanity, but did not offer an option to re-image humanity by another ideal. Further, Afro-Christians chose to affirm themselves in counter distinction from a constructed opposing representation of anti-humanity, blues people. God’s presence, in the Afro-Christian perspective of the Reconstruction period, was no longer articulated in the more fluid receptions of the Exodus narrative, and the Gospels adopted by the enslaved.

As consumer culture, civic engagement, and representative politics ensued, some of the formerly enslaved looked to “convert,” not only to Christianity but to the modern world. The Spirit/Flesh axiom became a dichotomous mechanism of dividing an emergent black modern self from the embarrassment of primitivism. The mistake in this move, however, was that the pejorative or stereotype of primitivism was itself a constructed image and not one that was representative of a

people with an emergent cosmivision. The blues vision for the land, the body, and the sonic helps to illumine a colonial difference. With this in view, the Spirit/Flesh axiom, and its hegemony can be seen from both racial and epistemic perspectives. Racially, the Spirit/Flesh is adopted to recast a legitimate “blackness” that takes on the Spirit/Flesh of Eurocentrism. Epistemically, the Spirit/Flesh is used to relegate the blues cosmivision to irrationality. “Becoming” Spirit/Flesh presents a problem for those victimized by racialization. What does one do with their cultural underpinnings when they “include” themselves in the Spirit/Flesh expression of humanity? The responses to this question are evidenced in the tensions between blues people and their Afro-Christian counter parts. It is in this tension that “the devils music” emerges as a pejorative to demonize the cultural production of the blues and its practitioners.

Under the Afro-Christian cosmivision that demonized the blues, blues virtuosi were pushed to repress the mystical sources of their sonic cultural production. They were deemed possessed vehicles of the demonic. In this scenario, Afro-Christian black humanity, just as the Eurocentric Spirit/Flesh humanity, was propped up by a negation of the cosmivision(s) implicit in blues humanity. Does this not amount to an employment of the colonial episteme and Greco-Roman theological anthropology towards the acheivement of a black “Spirit/Flesh” end? There are several representations of this point within the historical record and commentaries on the blues as cultural production.

Albert Murray clarified that the blues refers to both the blues-idiom dance movement and “low-spirits,” or “the blues as such.” This distinction, while subtle, is

helpful in distinguishing the consequences of the forced context as well as the cultural production employed to cope with those consequences. Murray recognized the significance of the blues people and their creation of the Saturday Night Dance Function as an alternative space for coping. The tension between the blues music/idiomatic dance (the blues matrix) and the Afro-Christian matrix is not a tension based in a binary or representation of two hermetically sealed complexes of knowledge. Rather, they should both be seen as distinguishable options of engaging the reality of the Delta region specifically (for our purposes) as it relates to “the blues as such.” It should be remembered that the “blues as such” or “the feeling of being blue” was a shared reality regardless of one’s religious sensibility. While this chapter has focused on the intra-racial dynamics surrounding the blues cosmivision, there is a larger trans-cultural reception of the blues that extends beyond the intra-racial boundary. Within the cosmological imaging of blues people, the “blues as such” was personified and spiritualized. As this materiality was disseminated through the record industry, “the blues as such” and “the blues-idiom dance movement,” the knowledge of the body, the sonic, and the hope for the land was globalized through records, radio, television, and the internet. Media technology provided multiple avenues for reception and exchange across the boundary of the ethno-racial complex known as black American culture.

All of this withstanding, our focus has aimed at explicating the blues and its affirmation of humanity in the face of colonial domination. This affirmation is especially apparent in the three contours of the blues cosmivision, the sensual, the sonic and the land. The “blues as such,” then, is the people’s way of naming the

psycho-social effects that resulted from the repression of an emergent cosmivision. These cosmological politics, as suggested by the emphasis on space in the second chapter, are entangled within the coloniality of power exacted on the environment of the Delta Region.

The post-emancipation context in the Delta provided an opportunity for black Americans to travel beyond the confines of plantations. Moreover, the day to day reality of life reached a greater complexity as black Americans enjoyed a degree of freedom which allowed them the space to determine how they would spend their time and with whom they would spend their time. The vast amount of references to love interests in blues songs is a celebration of this freedom. Despite the lament often associated with the *blues as such*, the blues was the first music of its kind to address these issues openly in a celebratory and permissive way. When heard and observed, the music of the blues carries the celebration and the joy that comes from actualizing one's freedom to feel and express physical love, for better or worse, without the constant surveillance of the enslaver. Nevertheless, such a moment of celebration is simultaneously burdened by realities of the "forced context." The burden of reality is often carried and communicated in the lyrics. In some cases, physical love and autonomy in the expression of sexuality were nothing to celebrate. Malnutrition, poverty, disease, transiency, and migration to the Northern cities were all factors that placed great strain on loving relationships.

One song performed by Mississippi Matilda entitled *Hard Working Woman* illustrates this point well and is fitting as the last word on the emergent cosmivision that embraced the sonic and the sensual to name the deep loss of the land. Matilda's

song indicates that no matter how hard she worked, her love interest, referred to as “baby,” could not treat her well, because he was likely working just as hard. As she performed the song, it was made evident that her inability to receive care could lead her to death or a swift departure away from the place, *the land*, she calls home:

Lord I’m a hard workin’ woman and I work hard all the time
Lord I’m a hard workin’ woman and I work hard all the time
But it seem like my baby, lord, he isn’t satisfied.

I have to go to my work baby, ‘tween midnight and day
I didn’t think my baby would treat me this-a-way
Go to my work baby, ‘tween midnight and day
I didn’t think my baby, lord, would treat me this-a-way

Lord I’m a hard workin’ woman, lord I’m a common rolling stone
Lord I’m a hard workin’ woman, lord I’m a common rolling stone
And the way my baby treats me, lord I ain’t gon’ be here long

Now do you remember the morning baby, you knocked upon my door
You told me, daddy, you didn’t have nowhere to go
Can’t you remember, you knocked upon my door
You told me, baby, you didn’t have no place to go

Lord I’m a hard working woman, babe and I work hard, sick or well
Lord I’m a hard working woman, lord and I work hard, sick or well
Lord all I gets from my baby, hey hey is a heap of hell²⁵⁵

²⁵⁵ As written in: Kubik, *Africa and the Blues*, 79.

Chapter 4

Revelation and Knowledge in the Delta: A Blues Take on the Modern/Colonial World and its Theological Foundations

Introduction

What these chapters have endeavored to show is how the spatial reading of the blues helps to situate it in the entanglements, resultant not only from the modern/colonial, but local emergence of the Spiritual, Holiness, and black Protestant congregations in the Delta Region. As we saw with Giggie's insights, Afro-Christian movements were no monolith. Contrasting visions of the Christian life were present within each movement and as a result of these contrasts, the problem of epistemological hegemony persisted within the Afro-Christian theological imagination. The adoption of epistemological hegemony in Afro-Christian churches, as this chapter will argue, is the result of an uncritical adoption of the Eurocentric understanding of revelation as knowledge.²⁵⁶ Spiritual and Holiness churches along with their leaders were seen as primitive enclaves of slave religion and often looked down upon by Black Baptists, Colored Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist

²⁵⁶ See Giggie, *After Redemption : Jim Crow and the Transformation of African American Religion in the Delta, 1875-1915*, 172-93. Here, Giggie provides a historical sketch of the Holiness movement as it emerged from churches founded by William Christian, Charles Price Jones and Charles Harrison Mason. Giggie notes that the budding consumer market, the railway system and the emergence of fraternal orders and pleasure clubs prompted what some Afro-Christians considered as "dissent" or waywardness. The Holiness movement, led by the leaders above, moved to counteract these so called temptations of modern life. It is in this history where one can see the different visions of life amongst black Americans living in the Delta. This history is the basis for what will be referred to later as the intra-racial level of the colonial difference. Also of note is the ways in which the Holiness movement amongst black Americans revived some of the organizational and moral development tactics of the John Wesleyan movement of "Holiness" that emerged within the U.S. colonies in the 1740's. After 1865, the movement spread to the Delta Region and was popularized by evangelists such as Joanna Patterson Moore and Amanda Berry Smith.

Episcopal and Black American Methodists.²⁵⁷ On the other hand, the theological, enterprising and political initiatives of black Protestant congregations were looked upon by the Spiritual and Holiness communities as sinful distractions to the process of spiritual development.²⁵⁸ Amid these entanglements, the dynamics of conversion, sanctification, and redemption were appropriated to articulate visions for how congregations saw themselves in the Delta Region. Further, the sacred and profane binary became a way of establishing difference. It is at this juncture that we can see coloniality expressed via the Afro-Christian theological imagination.

To clarify this particular type of coloniality, I draw upon the decolonial thought of Nelson Maldonado Torres and his reading of Christopher Columbus' imagination of the South American natives. His words are significant and worth quoting at length:

Upon having judged the indigenous as subjects “without religion,” Columbus had altered the medieval idea regarding the “chain of being” and had made it possible to think of the “condemned” no longer in exclusively Christian and theological terms, but rather in terms that were modern and anthropological. The “condemned” of the modern era not only lacked truth, but also diverged fundamentally from that which was considered to be a human being. Their shortcomings result not so much from their judgment, but from a problem in their very being. The coloniality of power then is born simultaneously with the coloniality of being. In these different ways, Columbus took charge of transgressing the two fundamental vertices of the feudal Christian episteme with a single gesture. While he would continue to look to Rome and Jerusalem as the central axes (axis Mundi) of a world defined in terms of the holistic and systemic view of

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Giggie specifically refers to the recorded sermons of William Christian in which he is critical of those Black Baptist and Methodist churches that saw the “conversion experience” as the primary indicator of salvation. Christian and his followers argued that salvation was based on the scriptural event of Sanctification on the day of Pentecost. Similar to Wesley, Christian argued that the Holy Spirit was the vehicle of sanctification and the highest moment of the sanctification process was the gift of “supernatural power.” In addition, Christian was critical of the relationship between fraternal orders and black Protestant congregations. See: *ibid.*, 166.

Christianity, his classification of the indigenous as nonreligious subjects already announces the existence of an order that would emphasize anthropology over theology and racial classification over Christian polemics. Columbus' epistemic feat would give new meaning to the idea that while he himself was not a modern subject, he did play a crucial role in opening the doors of modernity.²⁵⁹

What Torres argues about the makings of modernity in Columbus' transgression of the feudal Christian episteme and the inauguration of the "coloniality of being" can be applied here to think about the ways in which Afro-Christian congregations employed revelation as a means of articulating being. Afro-Christianity mimics or inherits the modernist turn towards a binary understanding between those who participate in Christian religion and those who do not; just as Columbus considered the natives to be without religion and thus ontologically inferior. Afro-Christians employed a similar method of ontological distinction which exacted itself in the space of the Delta Region. Churches, Dance Halls or Juke Joints; Barrel Houses; River Boats; trains; levee and turpentine camps; and Gaming Houses, all became representations of the order of things revealed through scripture and the Holy Spirit. Further, the need to construct an alternative view of the self that rivaled the ideology of racial hierarchy became central as a tactic for projects of political equality amongst black Americans. Religion and the theological imagination served as an apparatus for the pursuit of this equality. These dynamics can be said to make up a perspective on the modern/colonial world. Like Columbus, Afro-Christians employed the idea of revelation to ground and justify their movements of morality and religious belonging. As Giggie suggests, the focus on moral development,

²⁵⁹Nelson Maldonado Torres, "Aar Centennial Roundtable: Religions, Conquest, and Race in the Foundations of the Modern/Colonial World," *American Academy of Religion* 82, no. 3 (2014): 651.

conversion, and sanctification in Afro-Christian imagination were built on the idea that ecclesial membership guaranteed a portion of the stability and safety made known by the revelation of God through Scripture, the Holy Spirit, and preaching.

The insight of Giggie's work is the connection between the theological imagination and the activities and "movements" amongst Afro-Christians living in the Delta. It is from these activities and movements that we can see revealed knowledge at work. The focus on activity and the difference amongst these activities, rather than racial difference, moves to delink activity from a function of preconceived ontology or anthropology. In other words, what becomes unique about the blues is not that it emerged from an oppressed *race* of peoples. Rather, what is significant is the ways in which the blues articulates a way of life that counterstates the knowledge implicit in the morality and theological cosmologies of Afro-Christian churches. As such, the blues enunciates itself at a border imposed not only by white supremacists, but also by Afro-Christian churches.

Blues people emerge alongside Afro-Christian churches and their notions of piety that signified the activities of dancing, the consumption of alcohol, sex, and sexuality as sinful temptations and obstacles to racial uplift and spiritual development.²⁶⁰ Blues people who often engaged in these temptations were effectively ontologized or signified and represented as the opposite of piety. The Afro-Christian perspective on religious difference mimics the logic of Columbus by signifying a religious other. This religious other, however, does not pivot on the

²⁶⁰ Giggie, *After Redemption : Jim Crow and the Transformation of African American Religion in the Delta, 1875-1915*, 79.

racial distinction about whiteness. Rather, it pivots on the distinction of activity about the different visions for life present amongst black Americans. The suggestion here is that the black/white binary has been overused by black Americans as a way of reading and thinking about humanity in the modern/colonial world. This way of reading and thinking only tells part of the story. The danger of this fragmented way of discussing modernity is that it continues a narrative that conceals the way in which the projection of the ideology of race *produces* the conditions of coloniality. Under these conditions, non-European visions of humanity and human difference are suppressed or made invisible. Imposed stereotypical differences flatten cosmological, political, and cultural differences amongst those who are subalternized via anti-black racialization. From the Eurocentric perspective, cultural and ethnic differences of African peoples are read as black, and signified as irrational, infantile beings incapable of self-organization.

This Eurocentric notion imposes humanity, or as Wynter suggests, it *overrepresents* humanity. Racial identity politics are often used to respond to the Eurocentric idea of Man, and its overrepresentation. Racial identity politics are those politics that leverage racial identity for economic, political, moral, or ethical gains. One of the problematics of identity politics is that they work to impose ontologically based conceptions of humanity in an essentialist way. Under the guise of identity, persons are represented and managed as fixed forms. The fixity of these imposed subjects is the product of an assumption or an *a priori* knowledge of human difference. Racialized human difference is restrictive and reduces the complexity of how human beings relate to their respective environments. The colonial

signification of skin color as representative of a hierarchy of labor roles endures after the colony as lived ontology. Whether or not the use of racialization is positive or negative is arbitrary and does not disrupt the way in which racialization engages in the production of an abstraction or imagined form of articulating difference. Revelation, as Afro-Christianity has adopted it, was employed to justify the imposition of racial distinction. At the intra-racial level of the so-called "black experience," the subaltern perspective on coloniality is not *just* the absence of the governing ideology of white supremacy. Another way of thinking about this is to say that the critique of anti-black racism is not in and of itself the critique of coloniality. Subaltern perspectives on coloniality also recognize the presence of contrasting ways of interpreting the meaning of humanity. Blues provides an alternative basis of knowledge that does not privilege the cultural center of Europe and its colonial difference, nor does it privilege the Afro-Christian adoption and appropriation of the Christian religion as its epistemological center. As such, the blues enunciates an alternative basis for "knowing" the meaning of life made known in God's self-disclosure. In what follows in this final chapter, our aim is to draw on the insights of blues gnosis as a way of constructing a blues perspective on the theology of revelation. To achieve this task, we will move to explicate the theological implications of what we set out in the previous chapter as the land, the sonic, and the sensual.

The Land

What does the blues tell us about the land as a reflection of the sanctity of life? In general, the blues speaks from in between the earth and the project of

modernity that signified the earth and its goods as a commodity (European eco-history). As we have seen through the work of Clyde Woods, the blues vision for the Delta Region resituated the role of labor such that those racialized as black could find a life-affirming relationship with lands of the Delta.²⁶¹ Labor clans, as noted in Steve Hahn's research, reflect this emphasis on dignity and the self-organizing activity amongst the emancipated and the subsequent generations who worked to divide labor based on their vision for life and living.²⁶² While the history of labor clans or squads intertwines with European notions of gender roles²⁶³, the point in both Woods' and Hahn's interpretation of this activity is that it reflected a vision of life that was counter to the Mississippi Plan which overdetermined how the racialized could live and carry out their lives. From the perspective of labor squads and clans, the extraction and refinement of "Commodities" was no longer the object of their labor.²⁶⁴ Family life, leisure, play, and participation in the local consumer market decentered the colonial vision of their labor as an absolute utility of capital gain. This activity among blues people points to a way of thinking about the land and its fruits as a basis for organizing life.

While the blues cosmivision does not tell us about being black or about a new academic theological enterprise, it does tell us that the revelation of the God of Life can be experienced in a full way if we are open to the many visions of life that comprise human history. The blues vision that unfolds in the Delta Region suggests

²⁶¹ See Chapter 2 p. 81-82

²⁶² Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet : Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration*, 172.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 167.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 166.

to us that life is fundamentally relational. Moreover, the relationality expressed in life is inclusive of a relationship with the life-giving materials of the land. Within the forced geography of the Delta Region, the blues perspective called into question the vision of life reflected in the Afro-Christian witness of God's revelation. The challenge of the blues goes under-appreciated because of the ways in which theological categories were used to signify the blues as diametrically non-Christian (the devils music) and, therefore, absent of epistemological value. Such categorical significations have underwritten many of the myths of modernity that have suggested scriptural foundations for the permissibility of epistemic hegemony, genocide, enslavement, gender oppressions, and racial hegemony.²⁶⁵ Within the self-organizing activity of the labor clans in the Delta Region we see not the emergence of a mighty race railing against its white oppressors, but a people's vision of life that looked to make their forced situation between their landlords and the earth more life-giving.

Blues activity is a humanizing activity that aids not only black American wage-earning field hands, but also their white counterparts dominated by the monopolization of their subsistence farming practices.²⁶⁶ Reads of this period that proceed with a blanket understanding of white supremacy miss the insights of Hahn, Woods, and others that show how white supremacy was mainly a divisive tactic to disenfranchise the ability of poor non-plantation owning whites from

²⁶⁵ My use of significations here echoes Charles Long's use of the term. For more on the problem of signification see: Long, *Significations : Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion*, 1-9. For more on epistemic hegemony see Reiland Rabaka's work and his discussion of "epistemic apartheid": Rabaka, *Against Epistemic Apartheid : W.E.B. Du Bois and the Disciplinary Decadence of Sociology*, 18.

²⁶⁶ Woods, *Development Arrested : The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta*, 151.

leveraging the votes of predominately black counties in the Delta Region. Is not the revelation of the life that God makes known reflected in the collective actions of the labor squads or clan and their white comrades? The history of these visions for life, for the patient critical reader, is an invitation to an expansive understanding of solidarity grounded in the principle of epistemic freedom. That the landowners were often reluctant to disrupt the ontology of white supremacy does not change the fact that the squads were reflecting the sanctity of life in persuasive and inviting ways. Against the claim that the squads tell us something about the exceptional humanity of black peoples, the point here is to highlight that the squads, as representative of a blues vision of life, do not tell us anything further about a supposed "black" subjectivity. This type of racial designation is equally entrapped by an a priori ontological categorization whose roots are deep in the soil of the modern secular imagination. The historical signs that the blues vision was an affirmation and reflection of the sanctity of life, rather than a transcendental racial ontology, is reflected in the many interracial efforts of tenant farmers, sharecroppers, and wage earners. Together, people of different skin color organized against the plantation economy that held commodity production and the receipt of profit above the vision of everyday life in harmony with the ecology and geography of the Delta.

The blues vision for the land in the Delta Region decolonizes spatially. It decenters the idea of commodification and maximization of labor replacing it with kinship and fictive kinship relationships as the basis by which the formerly enslaved

imaged themselves in the Delta Region.²⁶⁷ Such a vision radically disrupts the planters and their Mississippi Plan for development which would eventually move to see this form of self-organization as a threat to the plantation economy and the natural order of “white supremacy.”²⁶⁸ There is a deeply convoluted coloniality expressed in the Mississippi Plan for Development. The commonly held assumption that white supremacy overran the Delta Region obscures the coloniality of the Mississippi Plan of Development. While white supremacy was indeed present, blanket assessments of this fact miss the local geospatial differences that distinguish the Delta Region.²⁶⁹ As such, the theology of revelation and its importance was reduced and primarily only lent itself to justifying or confronting the problem of anti-black racism and socio-economic oppression. Theologian, Joseph Washington, illuminated the above entanglements with his radical question, “Are American Negro Churches Christian?”²⁷⁰

While Washington’s work does not focus on the land in the way that the previous chapters have, his point about the limitation of the Afro-Christian theological imagination helps to clarify how racial ideology truncates the meaning of revelation. Joseph Washington’s critical question, “Are American Negro Churches Christian?” is derived from his position that black American Protestant churches lacked theological foundations. This lack of theological foundation, Washington

²⁶⁷ Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet : Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration*, 166.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 174-75.

²⁶⁹ Woods, *Development Arrested : The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta*, 16-17.

²⁷⁰ Joseph R. Washington, "Are American Negro Churches Christian?," in *Black Theology : A Documentary History*, ed. James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993), 92-100.

argued, proceeded from the ways in which enslaved Africans received religious instruction from Protestant missionaries during enslavement. He argued that the missionaries assumed a biological predisposition to irrationality amongst the enslaved and, therefore, deemed them incapable of theological development, especially regarding the doctrine of freedom. As a result, the ideal of freedom espoused by black Americans during enslavement and after emancipation is one that has little roots in Christian Doctrine. Washington notes that this failure in theological education was more substantial than the lack of moral inaction in regards to the system of enslavement, which he argues was primarily a function of culture and not Christian theology.²⁷¹

Nevertheless, the missionaries did, according to Washington, spend a great deal of time committed to salvation and moral development amongst the enslaved. Washington intuits that this focus on moral development as the requisite for a heavenly reward manipulates theology to maintain control over the psyche of those enslaved persons inspired by revolt and dissent.²⁷² Placed in concert with Quijano's assessment of racialization²⁷³, Washington's assessment can be read as a type of extension of the racialization process through the medium of theological development or, in this case, underdevelopment. The racist assumptions of the missionaries reflect Quijano's articulation of the modern meaning of race: "a mental construction that expressed the basic experience of colonial domination and

²⁷¹ Ibid., 96.

²⁷² Ibid., 97-98.

²⁷³ Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," in *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, 182-83; 201.

pervaded the more important dimensions of global power, including its specific rationality: Eurocentrism." ²⁷⁴

The connection between Washington and Quijano's insight is that Washington realized that racial unity was a modern construction rather than a theologically (Quijano's mental construction) validated idea. Washington correctly saw that the enslaved, those racialized as black, were, as a function of their African origin and skin color, signified as unfit for theological instruction. Whether or not the Euro-American evangelists were aware of the critical and cognitive capacities of enslaved blacks was inconsequential to the effect—theological underdevelopment along racial lines. For instance, a missionary who was aware of the cognitive potential of the enslaved could have withheld instruction on the doctrine of freedom as a means protecting the racial hierarchy of the plantation system. On the other hand, evangelists could have retained an abolitionist outlook coupled with the idea that enslaved blacks were, by no fault of their own, biologically²⁷⁵ predisposed to the limit of moral instruction based on a system of reward and punishment. Either way, the effects of the theological underdevelopment further exacerbated the racial boundary. The previous chapters have been a means of trying to articulate an option for approaching an epistemic problem in the understanding of revelation by considering cultural production as having a spatial effect. This spatial effect aims at a culture of life rather than the colonial organization of life.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ This analytical emphasis on biology examples Quijano's description of the mechanisms that make racial differences "real." Quijano's work explains how the European disciplines of biology, anthropology, psychology, religion and sociology function out of the foundational assumption of European superiority. He argues that these disciplinary projects justify Europeans as the universal "protagonists of history." Ibid., 192.

As we can see through the insights of Quijano and Washington, the space where life unfolds is already predisposed to the coloniality of spatial organization via the instrument of race. The blues as an option for life that looks to the sonic, the land, and the body as life-giving offers an opportunity for thinking in a way that provincializes the racial unity element of Afro-Christianity. As Washington suggests, this provincialization has theological implications:

The Negro has grounded his belief in Christianity in an ethical code, the principles of which are not founded in an enduring faith and therefore devoid of content and the refreshment of a critical dimension. The principles he [sic] esteems are not relevant to his [sic] contemporary needs. Thus, the Negro is forced to depend upon civil rights, religious feeling, sentiment, and color as substitutes for faith. It is this absence of historical loyalty to the Christian faith which expresses itself as religious sentiment.²⁷⁶

Washington's efforts pointed to an end of the default theological disposition resultant from the forced context of race. This over-dependency on race is akin to a type of overrepresentation, as was discussed earlier via Wynter's notion of Man and its overrepresentation.²⁷⁷ Further, racial identity and the ideology of racial identity that pervades black religion performs the problem of overrepresentation, this time, at an intra-racial level. It is not enough to speak about this as an *assimilation* to the Eurocentric representation of Man.²⁷⁸ It is also necessary to analyze the implications which follow black American *appropriations* of the overrepresentation mechanisms. Washington sheds light on this through his critical analysis of the theological

²⁷⁶ Washington, "Are American Negro Churches Christian?," in *Black Theology : A Documentary History*, 100.

²⁷⁷ See my earlier discussion on Wynter p. 114-117.

²⁷⁸ This emphasis on the difference between appropriation and assimilation is meant to recognize the capabilities of black Americans to make decisions about how they think about the world. Assimilation is often understood as passive or forced capitulation while appropriation signifies conscious revision or reconstruction.

underdevelopment of "Negro Churches," however it is necessary now to also clarify how this initial moment endures in the suppression of the blues and its move to delink from a strict notion of racial identity.

Phillip Linden, Jr. has illumined the theological implications of such a delinking in his call for black Americans to move beyond race. Linden's points are crucial to what has been articulated here as a need to provincialize Afro-Christianity's use of racial ideology. Linden is helpful mainly because of his analysis of the makings of the Atlantic World and the emergence of the Americas as a collection of "self-interested" societies. In an article entitled "Letting' Go of Race," Linden employs the historical hermeneutics of Fernand Braudel to critique the ways in which "Black History" is read. Linden posits that it is a mistake to read events, such as the Emancipation, and the Civil rights as signs of progress. Instead, these historical moments should be read as "duration" or an extension of the project that built the Atlantic World – and its individualized self-interested inhabitants.²⁷⁹

With Fernand Braudel's historical theory of the "long duration of time" ²⁸⁰ in hand, Linden moves to call out racial identity politics as continuous with the violence of the Atlantic World. Linden's reading counters many of the racial readings of history that primarily read modernity as a project of white supremacy that amounts to a moral failure.²⁸¹ These readings often disconnect racial domination

²⁷⁹ Phillip J. Linden, "Letting Go of Race: Reflections from a Historical Theological View," *Voices* XXXVI, no. 1 (2013): 77.

²⁸⁰ Braudel, *On History*, 3-4.

²⁸¹ While there are more thinkers that Linden can be read in conjunction with, the references here provide a sampling of Linden's contemporaries who leverage race as a means of confronting the victimization of black Americans. His work is a radical critique of the makings of race which place him in counter-distinction from many who built what is now known as "Black Theology." Prefiguring some of the Marxian critiques of Black Theology by Cornel West, Linden's radical understanding of

from global colonial domination. Linden's critique aims at those who seek equal treatment under the law, as the primary object of theological, social, economic, political, and moral progress. Linden's insight is his radical interpretation of "equal treatment" as the achievement of the trade interests that built the Atlantic World. The idea of trading humans was motivated primarily by individual self-interest at the expense of the life-giving relationships of family, community, and society. Racial identity politics, according to Linden are an outgrowth of this fundamental self-interested humanity born in the construction of the Atlantic World.²⁸² This freedom, as we showed via Washington above, only masquerades as theology, or worse becomes the object of the theological imagination of life. The violence of the Atlantic world, in Linden's work, is the dismantling of human relationships sacrificed at the altar of self-interest. In sum, Linden clarifies that the perniciousness of the Modern project rests in those systems of thought that legitimize the hierarchical domination necessary to give the "self-interested human" the power to delink themselves from the responsibility of communal living.²⁸³

Race, as a part of the Atlantic World, provided a means of justifying self-interest as the natural evolutionary telos of all humanity. Race, in so far as it

the Atlantic World still has importance as many are still beholden to the ideology of race with no feasible end in sight, including West himself. For West's critique of Black Theology see: Cornel West, "Black Theology and Marxist Thought," in *Black Theology : A Documentary History*, ed. James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993). For examples of those who leverage race in the construction of an alternative to racism see: Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom : Body, Race, and Being*. For an articulation of Linden's early treatment of the makings of race in relation to the issues segregation amongst U.S. Catholic Priests see: Jr. Phillip J. Linden, "Reviewed Work: Desegregating the Altar: The Josephites and the Struggle for Black Priests, 1871-1960 by Stephen J. Ochs," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 11, no. 1 (1993).

²⁸² Linden, "Letting Go of Race: Reflections from a Historical Theological View," 77.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 83.

constructed a system by which one's self-interest, pursues the creation of a permanent subservient class, the eternal resource of modern life. To this point

Linden writes:

Race has consistently been the focal point for interpreting the black experience in the United States. This has led to a few assumptions. One assumption is that slavery is racial, and that racism is the source of all problems for blacks in America. This assumption means that the color of people's skin was decisive in the formation of New World slavery and slave trading. Another assumption is that the solution to the problem of race must itself be an intense advocating of the racial reality; thus, the fixation on cultural identity or forms associated with the peoples of color.²⁸⁴

With Linden in mind, the need to provincialize Afro-Christianity is made clear in that it becomes an institutional center by which the ideology of racial identity is the primary means of confronting the effect of white supremacist ideology. In this regard, the victimization of black Americans by racism should make them want to leave racial thinking behind as they become more aware of its constitutive relationship with the securing of the self-interests of European expansion and the establishment of the United States under a new ideal of self-interested humanism. This humanism, as Enrique Dussel has argued, is fundamentally violent and produces a constitutive alterity.²⁸⁵

Linden complicates the racial signification of the victim that suffers in the "alterity" of modernity by resisting the blanket application of anti-black racism as the sole explanation of black American victims. Moreover, Linden laments what he has identified as a ratcheting up of racial identity politics as a means of securing "silver-Rights." Silver rights are those rights which guarantee upward mobility in

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 77-78.

²⁸⁵ Dussel, Krauel, and Tuma, "Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism," 473-74.

the highest levels of economic status. In his final estimation, Linden indicts the pursuit of “silver-Rights” as the pursuit of equal access to self-interested humanism under the law. In the pursuit of “silver-rights,” black Americans become “self-interested” and enter modernity via their appropriation of race. Such an entry is radically complicit in the violence of modernity and conceals not only the expansive humanity of black persons, but also that of racial others. The construction of a racial identity is an activity of securing self-interests in the makings of the Atlantic World. To put his analysis in conversation with the contemporary expressions of the colonial logic of race, Linden also moves to show how the current emphasis on diversification is replete with a similar misdiagnosis of the roots of modern domination. Diversity projects that flaunt the promise of equal access and representation extend the forms of access to participation in self-interestedness. Diversity, in distinction from racialization, proceeds as a second step. In this second step, diversification creates a moral obligation to a particular type of difference, one justified by every person’s individual right to racialized self-interest. Stated another way, moral progress depends on increasing access to the goods produced by the expansion of the market that thrives on self-interested consumers and participants. As Linden argues via David Harvey, diversity is produced by the pursuit of capital (self-interest) and offers an opportunity for the expansion of capital.²⁸⁶

The history of the Race Record and the cooptation of blues music for the purpose of capital gains is an example of this “diversity” tactic.²⁸⁷ By diversifying the

²⁸⁶ Linden, "Letting Go of Race: Reflections from a Historical Theological View," 79-80.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

American record market with black musicians and black music, the Race Record industry simultaneously *produced* both the construction and commodification of black identity. The consumption of this identity was irrespective of race. Blacks in the North often mythologized the recording artists from the South who referred to imagery that was indigenous to the rural South.²⁸⁸ While blues artists were used by record companies to expand their consumer base and their capital, the by-product of this expansion was the popularization of the themes, personalities, and life world of the blues singers. As seen in the insights of Albert Murray, blues people, frontier peoples, indigenous, first nation, and the bluegrass peoples of Appalachia were made into the “primitive” as a means of distinguishing white American exceptionalism. On the other hand, black Americans from Black Nationalist and Afrocentric perspectives romanticized black rural life to construct a counter identity of black exceptionalism.²⁸⁹ In this move of romanticism, the lives of those most dominated by the mechanisms of capital were turned into national icons that symbolized the past upon which America could repair its differences. Folklore, for Murray, conceals the deleterious conditions in which the so called “folk” are forced to survive.²⁹⁰ As *minstrels* at the service of the narrative of racial being, the voices of blues musicians were suppressed and signified. Contrary to their national image, the blues musician was an integral component, not in some quasi-Nationalist spirit of Americanness, but in a vision of life that was indifferent to the production of

²⁸⁸ Paul Garon, *The Devil's Son-in-Law : The Story of Peetie Wheatstraw & His Songs*, rev. & expanded ed. (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Pub. Co., 2003), 60.

²⁸⁹ Murray, *Stomping the Blues*, 203-05.

²⁹⁰ Even Dussel makes mention of the problem of the recovery of a folkloric past as a means of building solidarity amongst global “folk” pasts. For more on this see: Dussel, Krauel, and Tuma, “Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism,” 474.

American nationalism through the means of race-based identity politics and the leveraging of racial identity. This is what Ralph Ellison indicated when he reflected on the life of blues singer Bessie Smith:

Bessie Smith might have been a “Blues Queen” to the society at large, But within the tighter Negro Community where the blues were a total way of life, and major expression of an attitude toward life, she was a priestess, a celebrant who affirmed the values of the group and man’s ability to deal with chaos.²⁹¹

In Ellison’s words, what is most functional, is not race, but the attention to “attitude” and the “total way of life.”

As Linden indicates, the theological effects of racial ideology are far reaching. Racial ideology poisons our ability to see life beyond our self-interested desire to participate in the market. Individualized interest in the self impedes spirituality or a life of complex participation in the *Life* revealed by Jesus. Participation in the *Life* revealed by Jesus, according to Linden, is a life lived exposed to the conditions of the poor. It is in this exposure that one might encounter the mystery of God that ironically unfolds not in the pursuit of Civil Rights, but the pursuit of God's self-activity in history. As such, Linden argues that the task of the theologian, particularly the liberation theologian, is to do theology—not as a means of advancing the discipline—but as a means of opening up a view of the mystery of God. This view occurs at the intersection of the systems of domination and the world of the poor.

²⁹¹ As quoted in: Harrison, *Black Pearls : Blues Queens of the 1920s*, 7.

The aim of this dissertation is to do theology from the insights that come from the life world of blues people who lived and still are living within and beyond the Delta Region. Theirs is a life that engaged the discontents of modernity, not through a negotiation with the ideology of race, but through participation in life that was indifferent to the progressive tendencies of racial uplift politics. In the blues is a spirit of commitment to the life and the community that lives in deep connection with the rhythms of the earth. As a part of the leisure moments in the work day of sharecroppers and tenant farmers, blues music gave voice to life where race, Afro-Christianity and the Mississippi Plan of Development were present but not central. As Ellison proclaimed, blues artists were priests and priestesses, mediators of hope and life that persisted by endurance within the entanglements of the forced context and its imposing epistemologies. The blues people resisted an otherworldly spirituality, such as those popularized by black Protestant and Holiness churches who did not accept the mundane circumstances of everyday life as a mediation of transcendent revelation in history. That the blues people managed to give voice to an epistemic difference is not a testament to the resiliency of “blackness,” but a testament to the deep mystery of the planetary diversity of life and life-ways. The knowledge gleaned from the theological idea of revelation cannot on its own mediate this mystery. Such a mystery must endure as a mystery that remains open to the mediatory creativity of the planet which is made known via multiple epistemologies.

Afro-Christianity, particularly black Protestantism, and its need to leverage racial identity as a part of its political agenda for participation in the modern

mission of civilizing the race, wrested the power of racial identity formation and provided a vehicle for the continuation of the coloniality of power, this time, *in black*. The persistence of racial ideology remains in the way of efforts of many black persons looking for theological foundations and building solidarity with the rest of the world's subaltern perspectives. The blind pursuit of racial equality without a critique of coloniality leaves us with an inappropriate way of reading history and, as a result, race truncates the ways in which we can be open to the many manifestations of God's self-revelation as the God of Life. Recalling the sentiments of chapter one, what we have endeavored to do is to extend the insights of Hood's provincialization of Graeco-Roman metaphysics. Moving with and beyond Hood, we have applied provincialization to the racial logics that became the theological content for the construction of the Afro-Christian theological imagination. The Afro-Christian theology of racial redemption essentializes and universalizes race as the site of oppression for all black Americans. As such, racial redemption via equal treatment under the law becomes the historical representation of God's redemptive power in history. The sonic, the body, and the land then are excluded from this process, or at best are included in service to the agenda of racial progressivism.

The idea of race as a mode of identification and representation works to limit the other ways in which peoples live out their lives. Linden's insights, in concert with the theory of coloniality, Hood's critique of cultural hegemony, and the thought of Joseph Washington, help to illumine a dynamic of life that is present in the blues people of the Delta. In so far as the blues life world is less burdened by racial ontology, it reflects a sense of freedom from the representational politics that

prevent theological reflection and the project of solidarity. The theological way forward, then, is to look for the insights of the Delta blues people as a knowledge base for critical reflection on the God of History. This focus on insights departs from a planetary²⁹² way of understanding the human struggle with the modern/colonial world. The shift to a planetary spatial imagination is an effort to see the relationships among the various "borderlands" or those liminal spaces between modernity and the subaltern colonial difference. Regarding the blues, it is the space in between the Afro-Christian cosmivision, its inherent racial ideology, and the land that the blues people image as the place of life.

The blues image of space as a place that is constitutive with, yet distinct from, the Eurocentric project of Modernity prompts the theological endeavor of delinking revelation from hegemonic understandings of ontology, knowledge, and anthropology. The implications of this shift from the racial to the spatial suggest an increased solidarity with those peoples engaged in what Mignolo has articulated as border thinking.²⁹³ In distinction from Mignolo, we have looked more to local cultural production as representative of this idea of border thinking. Analytically speaking, the blues people do border thinking within the activity of singing, dancing and naming the blues perspective. Blues people reflect the analytic of border thinking by delinking their understanding of the reality from the colonial

²⁹²Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline, The Wellek Library Lectures in Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 72-74.

²⁹³ Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs : Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, 65-71.

anthropology of race, the spatial domination of the plantation, and the cosmological domination of the sacred/profane binary.

Continuous with this act of decolonial activity are the ways in which the theology of revelation justifies the colonial relationships and their historical durability. Namely, the blues prompts the theologian to consider that "redemption" or "freedom" granted through the activity of Jesus Christ's life, death, burial, and Resurrection should not prompt us to signify life and living strictly in our image.²⁹⁴ Mignolo clarifies this point with his term global design. Global design is an analytical term that signifies a people's globalization of their local history in a way that forcibly "designs" the globe as a function of their history. My point here is to highlight how the blues epistemic can illumine the ways in which Afro-Christianity designs, albeit locally, the Delta region by enforcing Graeco-Roman and Judeo-Christian notions of history. Despite this pressure placed on the blues cosmivision by the Afro-Christian global design, blues people built relationships according to their different visions for life and struggled to conserve and improve upon them. For blues people, the sonic and the production of blues music provided a historical repository for its cosmivision. The sonic, then, is another theme that is of importance in the appreciation of the epistemic insights in the blues.

The Sonic

Admittedly, what follows is limited by the methodological capacities of the writer. Ethnomusicology and music theory, while important to such a discussion, remain beyond the skill sets of this author. However, the commentaries on blues

²⁹⁴ For more on global designs see: *ibid.*, 21.

music and its interpretation, help to show the complexities of the blues Sonic and the ways in which Modern Christianity worked as an epistemological basis for interpreting the sonic world of the Delta Region. The blues as an epistemological center at the borders of Modern Christianity and its appropriation by Afro-Christian Churches countered epistemological imposition. It is in the music that we can see that this counter is not a turn to a purely secular, humanist or existentialist episteme. Such assessments that interpret blues music as an anti-religious turn in black American thought function too easily out of the binary understandings of the secular and the sacred. For instance, black American Humanists often use blues music and those that produced it to represent a “black” cultural legacy of the secularist turn in American and Euro-American culture.²⁹⁵ The geopolitics of Christian knowledge divided the world into zones and peoples with true religion, those with false religion and those with no religion at all. Under this geopolitical imagination blues, music reflected an aesthetic born from a zone of non-religion. Because of this, it was easily associated with the Christian signifier of evil, the devil.

²⁹⁵ In these statements I am reading the literature on blues in concert with the decolonial analysis employed throughout the dissertation. To date, I know of few assessments that read the blues from the insights of decolonial analysis. The commentators of the blues often indict one another for marshaling the blues in constructing essences or prototypes of black humanism, Black Nationalism, Euro-American Nationalism, surrealist radicalism, white supremacy, and black feminism etc. An example of this is Amiri Baraka and Jon Michael Spencer who indict white commentators, such as Paul Garon and Paul Oliver, for their construction of the blues as a prototype and muse for white antiestablishment subculture. For more on this see: Spencer, *Blues and Evil*, 85-83. Baraka, *Blues People : Negro Music in White America*, 200. It is important to note that Baraka's goal in recovering the blues was to harness it as a basis for black cultural nationalism. His disagreement with surrealist, such as Paul Garon, is implicit and rests in this commitment to cultural politics. Responding in kind, Garon was often suspicious of how the black intellectual class appropriated the art form as a muse for the construction of a black middle class and radical political lifestyles. See: Garon, *The Devil's Son-in-Law: The Story of Peetie Wheatstraw and His Songs*, 61. Reading these assessments in light of Mignolo's point about the subaltern colonial difference, one can see how ideals born from within the *in house* arguments of modernity, particularly around race and class, often overdetermined the meaning of subaltern cultural production.

As Torres argues, via Wynter and Quijano, Native Americans and black Americans were racialized and promulgated as representatives of underdevelopment (they were supposedly unevolved) on the basis that they had no recognizable ethics based in transcendental knowledge. Torres argued that this assessment of African and Amerindian ethnicities ironically became a basis to dismantle the natural connection between revelation and knowledge.

According to Torres, Columbus' signification of the indigenous peoples as a people with no religion was an anthropological statement, and not a religious statement, based on revelation. Columbus looked upon the natives and saw a gulf of difference that did not signal to him that the indigenous peoples of the Americas were simply without true religion. Instead, the indigenous peoples were without religion at all. The representation of humanity as homo-religious in Columbus' eyes had an anthropologically perceivable limit. Peoples who dressed, talked, and lived like the indigenous were unrecognizable as religious and, therefore, were unrecognizable as being governed by the order of the knowledge rooted in revelation. While the "non-religious" nature of the indigenous gave the Christian mission its obvious target to "teach all nations," it also opened up lacunae in the universality of the Christian epistemic. The epistemological basis for assigning human difference was decentered to name and signify a people differently. As a result, knowledge was not only bound to revelation, but also to observation and the interpretation of observations. Columbus' observation is clear; the indigenous are not rational human beings because they have no religion. According to Columbus' logic, a new way of relating to the people of the Americas had to be assembled.

There was no longer a basis of religiosity from which there could be a common ground from which to communicate knowledge. Within these assemblages lies the basis of the colonial logic and the colonial world on one hand, and the basis for the modern secular episteme on the other. Columbus' anthropological signification of the non-religious indigenous being, in Torres' analysis, becomes the prototype for the Eurocentric secular human, Man. Such a position was still entrenched within the boundaries of Eurocentrism, which promoted objective reason as a universal basis for discerning truth. The shift from the Christian outlook to the secular outlook does not dislodge the Eurocentric notion of authoritative objectivity. Instead, it only shifts that authority from God to Man. Torres' recognition of this shift exposes the historical underpinnings of the modern/colonial world and the ways in which the colonial episteme is constructed against the cultures, epistemologies and cosmovisions of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, the Caribbean, and Africa.

With this type of analysis in place, the cultures and epistemologies of those who live in the colonial wound are given greater clarity. Blues music draws from this experience of the colonial wound and is similar to the visions of various decolonial perspectives across the planet. The blues shifted the locus of enunciation from the Graeco-Roman, Judeo-Christian and Eurocentric loci to the local experience of epistemological domination in the Delta. It is this insurgent anti-authoritarian perspective reflected in blues performers that begged modernity to stamp it out by reading it as yet another manifestation of racial stereotype. Such a categorical distinction would also come from those black Protestant and Holiness churches who adjusted their religiosity in response to the new found hope in full participation in

the promises of modernity. To them, the blues became representative of an adversarial entity that stood in the way of historical progress. Blues music was the devil's music. Ironically, this is what gave blues people the opportunity to make their vision for life visible.

As a counterstatement of the Afro-Christian cosmivision and its theological signification of God's opposite, the Devil, blues people constructed an existential experience that rivaled the Afro-Christian notions of seduction and the temptations of the Devil. To have *the blues*, or as Murray argued, "the blues as such," was a state equally as dangerous as one of temptation by the workings of the Devil.²⁹⁶ The blues named those "low-spirits"²⁹⁷ that hindered people from surviving their day to day struggles. Some read blues music as an aesthetic response to the "feeling of low spirits."²⁹⁸ Sonically, the blues sound worked in a similar fashion to the spirituals, the work songs, gospel music, and black preaching. The sound of the blues confronted the toils of everyday life with sonic creativity. Even if momentary, the sonic production of the blues performed the familiar function of giving people hope that the woes of living under the tyranny of the plantation did not have the last word on the sanctity of life.

In blues music, there is an alternative to the vision set in motion by the codification of sound by Afro-Christian Churches. This alternative is *heard*, in the ways in which the blues artists use song lyrics and sound to *play* with and on the assumed theological imagination of Afro-Christianity. When the Afro-Christian

²⁹⁶ Murray, *Stomping the Blues*, 45.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.

cosmovision imposes its authority to speak for the revelation of an omnipotent God capable of ridding the Delta and its peoples from the woes of plantation life blues people sang:

I must be serving the devil.
I can't be serving Jesus Christ.
Cuz I asked Jesus to save me and look like he trying to take my life.²⁹⁹

Lyrics, such as these, challenged the restrictive morality enforced by the promise of eternal life with God. Blues singers warned that moral piety could not guarantee security from the woes of the Plantation System or Jim and Jane Crowism. Living life required more than the achievement of moral respectability and an otherworldly ideal of salvation, it also required surviving the intense alienation of the plantation and the scarcity of employment which often sent many people wandering the Delta and eventually northern U.S. cities in pursuit of other means of living. Song's about travel and the misfortunes associated with travel were themes which countered the soteriological imagery of boarding trains and traveling to the "promised land of the North."³⁰⁰ Blues music also brought the topic of sexual relationships center stage.³⁰¹

Blues people embraced sexuality and sex in ways that rivaled the emergent respectability politics of black Churches. The sexual imagery in blues music reclaimed the body from the Victorianism that had woven its way into Afro-Christian religiosity. Blues singers often referred to their sexual abilities in ways that fully affirmed the joy and pleasures of sex. Similarly, the sound of blues music

²⁹⁹ As transcribed in: Oliver, *Blues Fell This Morning : Meaning in the Blues*, 118.

³⁰⁰ For more on travel blues themes see: *ibid.*, 51-52;57-62.

³⁰¹ *ibid.*, 99-101;07-08. On sexuality and the blues see also: Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism : Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*, 4-10; 53; 91-92. It is important to note here as well that Davis' contribution recovers the hidden transcript of women's protest in regards to sexuality.

itself produced moments for the expression of sensuality through dance.³⁰² The dancing associated with the blues sound often countered the mood suggested by the moans and shouts that often found their way into blues performances. As Murray suggested, “stomping” the blues through dance reflected the heroic spirit of survival and aesthetic production in the face of precarious life conditions.³⁰³ The sound of the moan and shouts in blues music were no different than the moans and shouts associated with the religious ecstatic in black preaching and worship.³⁰⁴ The recognition of this fluidity of sound has been recognized by scholars such as Houston Baker as the basis of a unifying vernacular that is apparent not only in black music, but literature and other cultural productions.³⁰⁵ In distinction from Baker, this dissertation has served to decenter the assumed idea of a racially organized people. Nevertheless, Baker’s point concerning the sound of spoken and sung English that develops in proximity to the blues is significant. Baker identifies the cultural production of the blues as distinguishable primarily because of its development in relative separation from the aesthetics of Euro-America. Baker prefigures the alterity theorized by Mignolo and others as the subaltern colonial difference. The distinction, however, is that Baker’s project is not as concerned with the dynamics of coloniality and the entanglements of global market capitalism. Nevertheless, Baker’s assessment of the interiority of the blues is highly insightful

³⁰² Murray, *Stomping the Blues*, 57.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 42.

³⁰⁴ Jon Michael Spencer, *Sacred Symphony : The Chanted Sermon of the Black Preacher, Contributions in Afro-American and African Studies* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 153; J.A. Noel, *Black Religion and the Imagination of Matter in the Atlantic World* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 153.

³⁰⁵ Houston A. Baker, *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature : A Vernacular Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 13-14.

and confirmed by blues commentaries of Amiri Baraka, Clyde Woods, and Gerhard Kubik. They all agree that the blues is a development unique to the post-emancipation plantation life world and the imposed separation of Euro-Americans and black Americans. This work has shown that there is also a significant amount of pressure placed upon blues people by the racial uplift, respectability, and domesticity movements supported by Afro-Christian churches. As Afro-Christian churches moved to take responsibility for "uplifting the black race," they also began to encroach on the sonic world of black American culture. In this encroachment, the sound of the Delta blues, a sound primarily produced by sung vocals and the guitar was, in some instances, banned from Afro-Christian sanctuaries.³⁰⁶

In an interview with Alan Lomax, the mother of the famous Delta blues guitarist and singer, Robert Johnson, Lomax recorded how Johnson's mother described his last moments on earth as a death bed confession culminated by him accepting the doctrine that the guitar was the devil's instrument. As told by his mother, Johnson's last moan was, "Here...Take and hang this thing on the wall because I done pass [sic] all that by. It is the devil's instrument, just like you said and I don't want it anymore."³⁰⁷ After that, Johnson reportedly confessed his belief in the God of Jesus and died. According to Lomax's records, Johnson's mother gets caught up in an ecstatic fit after telling the story of her son's death bed confession. While the truth of this story cannot be validated, it reflects how the Afro-Christian cosmivision marshaled the sacred and profane binary as a way of reading cultural

³⁰⁶ Roger Stolle and Lou Bopp, *Hidden History of Mississippi Blues* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2011), 103-04.

³⁰⁷ Lomax, *The Land Where the Blues Began*, 15.

production. All of the creativity and sonic production from Johnson's artistry was considered, in the eyes of his sanctified mother, to be insurmountable to the question of where his soul would rest. It is here that the insight of Washington shines through: "... it is not that Negro Churches do not believe in God but that they provide no middle ground along the way." ³⁰⁸ Johnson's mother judged his life primarily by his confession of faith in the God of Jesus. Inconsequential to Johnson's mother were the many ways in which he mediated the beauty of human creativity and the joy of living life through the sound of his music.

The story of Robert Johnson's death bed confession displays the ways in which the Afro-Christians condemned blues people as incapable of producing the sounds of the sacred. This condemnation was a function of the ways in which Afro-Christians understood the revelation of God as a mandate for how they should associate themselves with the sonic activity of blues people. The blues sonic that enlivens the cultural production of blues music speaks beyond the ethical and moral boundaries of life in Afro-Christianity, and Modern Christianity at large. The blues voice signifies and represents a people unified by a sonic activity rather than a constructed racial, sanctified identity. The blues reminds that the creativity inherent in the stylization of blues music is a sign of the human potential to deal with the struggles of life through sonic creativity. One blues artist articulated his position on the sonic in his reading of the Psalms:

Now a lot of Churches don't want you to bring a guitar in there but they've got a piano. What's the difference, its music? But, the Bible tells you to make a joyful noise with your instrument. When God said

³⁰⁸ Washington, "Are American Negro Churches Christian?," in *Black Theology : A Documentary History*, 98.

make a loud noise with your instrument he did not tell you not to sing 'Baby, please don't go' or nothing like that. He just said make a loud noise with your instrument and the Bible says when they're making a loud noise with their instrument they are singing Hallelujah.... It did not say what instrument.³⁰⁹

These words by blues singer, Mississippi Marvel, capture the sentiment of the expansive way in which blues people looked at the sonic as a mediation or a response to the deep sacramentality of everyday life. In the longing for a lover, one's cry, 'Please baby don't go!' is not mutually exclusive of the accompanying noise coming from the guitar. It still can say, Hallelujah. In his blues reading of the Psalms, Mississippi Marvel reflects what decolonial biblical scholar, Randall Bailey describes as the danger of ignoring one's own cultural bias in biblical interpretation.³¹⁰ Blues people held on to their sacramentality of the sacred sound as they saw fit. Musically, this is performed as the moan and shout of the singers or the vocalized stylization of the slide guitar in which the strings of the guitar are manipulated by metal or glass in order that their vibrations are extended to mimic the vocal moan.³¹¹ The moan, or as the Psalmist puts it, noise, is the response or call out to the expansiveness of the Divine.

³⁰⁹ Stolle and Bopp, *Hidden History of Mississippi Blues*, 103-04.

³¹⁰ Randall C. Bailey, "The Danger of Ignoring One's Own Cultural Bias in Interpreting the Text," in *The Postcolonial Bible*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 78-79. Here Bailey makes an argument that the biblical interpretation must make room for the cultural perspective of the reader. This requires deconstructing the infallibility of the text when it is contradictory to the vision of the Divine revealed and mediated through human experience and culture.

³¹¹ Noel describes the moan as the human response to non-being. Non-being for moan is the object of the religious imagination. Non-being, rather than being, is the object because it is the unmediated the ineffable that best reflects the Divine for Noel. This examples one way of deontologizing the starting point for theological reflection, as is the case with the ontology of race. See: Noel, *Black Religion and the Imagination of Matter in the Atlantic World*, 152.

James Noel has described this expansiveness as “non- being.” Noel’s insight is that he recovers non-being rather than discursive ontology as the focal point of theological reflection.³¹² Non-being rather than being, Noel argues, is the object of theological imagination. The Moan and Shout in their inarticulate tones are a performative expression of the ineffability of the object of Christian faith, the Divine. The ineffable moan, while it sometimes carries a lyric or word, is not a signified verbal communication it is simply noise, a sound, a vibrational frequency able to be sensed by the body. Ashon Crawley, in his work on queer sound, makes a similar point about the activity of sound when he asks, “Can a sound destabilize what we think is and can be “normal”? How can sound present to us otherwise worlds of possibility, otherwise imaginative flights of fancy, otherwise dreams? It’s all about relation—relation as vibration, movement propulsion against the normative order.”³¹³ Crawley’s approach to the question of queer sound is telling. He writes further:

For us musicians it is a question of sexual affective identity and our orientation to the type of music made. Certainly many of us in the world identify as queer. But what if queerness were more than identity? What if queerness were a force that moved through the world a force compelling vibration, movement, or relation otherwise? What if such queerness were about being open to varied and non-normative modes of relation?³¹⁴

By relating queerness to both force and the vibrational energy of sound, rather than sexual identity, Crawley makes a case similar to the one made here. The blues sonic,

³¹² Ibid., 65.

³¹³ Ashon Crawley, “That There Might Be Queer Sound,” The Pew Center for Arts and Heritage, accessed February 26, 2016, http://www.pcah.us/posts/219_that_there_might_be_queer_sound_by_ashon_crawley.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

I contend, is a force that resists codification into a closed system of revelation that renders its vibration and stylization of sound as already a reflection of demonic identity –a polar opposite to Christian identity. Crawley excavates the sound of the aesthetic production rather than preconceived notions concerning the sacredness or profaneness of the person that produces the sound. By bracketing constructed identities, both racial and gendered, Crawley hones in on the sonic relationships that defy the boundaries imposed upon those queer musicians in black churches. As Crawley argues, queer musicians, by virtue of their sexuality, are deemed sinful yet still desired for the sound that they produce—the sound that invites worship, joy, and ecstatic response. Crawley suggests that our attention can be drawn to something beyond the constructed identities of the pious Christian believer, the queer, and the black.³¹⁵ It is in this risk of shifting the focus that the sonic is rested from the *a priori* notions about the bodies that produce music. Crawley asks, is the sound itself queer? Further, is there a queer aspect to Divinity and the sound that mediates the Divine? In Crawley’s focus on sonic relationships, an “otherwise” world of dynamism comes to the fore that decenters the focus on discursive identities, and their representation.³¹⁶ It is sound and the relations of sounds that serve as the material that mediates knowledge.

Extending Crawley’s insights we can argue that, Afro-Christian churches hold no monopoly on sound and its mediations. This insight suggests that revelations can be mediated in sound just as much as they are mediated in space. If sound is holy in

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

one space, then why is it not holy in another? That the sound of the blues produces moods of joy should be enough for us to reverence its life giving quality which illumines the sanctity and diversity of life affirmed in the revelation of God. The proximity of a sound to the liturgical space should not make or break its affective power in mediating the deep sacramentality of life. The blues as a sonic activity has been under-appreciated as a mediation of God's self-disclosure. To bring this underappreciation to a close there must be a substantive and, as has been the attempt here, a substantiated break with the colonizing logics that represent the blues through theological ideas of insiders and outsiders, those with good religion, those with bad religion or those with no religion.³¹⁷ Without a decolonization of the cosmological assumptions that produce the categories which *represent* life, the differences present in human life-ways are veiled from free relationship with our senses. Behind the veil, theological mediations, just as Aimé Césaire so adequately articulated about modern scientific reasoning, will remain "half starved."³¹⁸ Césaire contended that a tragedy of the scientific revolution was a turning away from the human perspective of experience that was situated in poetics more so than science. As a response, Césaire contended that a "science of the word," a science based in the effective knowledge garnered from poetry, could give voice to the human experience of the world in ways that modern science could not. Poetry, for Césaire,

³¹⁷ This was the point articulated via the insights of Torres' reading of Christopher Columbus' anthropological assessment of the indigenous peoples of the Americas as peoples without religion.

³¹⁸ Césaire's work, "Poetry and Knowledge," is where Césaire makes the claim against the Enlightenment and the hierarchy of knowledge that poetry can function as knowledge. To this point, he claimed that the knowledge given by the sciences is "half starved" without the qualitative knowledge acquired from poetry. Aimé Césaire, Clayton Eshleman, and Annette Smith, *Lyric and Dramatic Poetry, 1946-82, Caraf Books* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990).

spoke more to the everyday experience of life and the matters of human living that objective scientific knowledge only explained away.

In the blues, we find not only Césaire's "poetry," which he described as a "science of the word," but also a science of the sonic. The sonic, as James Noel notes, makes present what words cannot. The decolonization of the idea of revelation can proceed by listening to these two sciences of word and sound. There is more to be gained by listening and reverencing the diversity of life-ways than from categorizing them into a closed systematic way of understanding the Divine reality. The blues sonic and the life-way that emerges around the sound of the blues challenges the ontological violence that would render its embrace of the body and its relation to dance movement, sex, and sexuality as only reflective of the temptations spawned by a demonic counter world. The blues reminds us that sound is a vibrational invitation to relationship, to hand claps, to foot stomps, to dance. That these moments of sensual communication can be experienced in the face of immense repression and oppression is indeed a reason for a "joyful noise."

The Sensual

In one of the first studies on black women singers of the blues, Daphne Duval Harrison wrote: "Women's blues...introduced a new, different model of black women -- more assertive, sexy, sexually aware, independent, realistic, complex, and alive."³¹⁹ It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to go further into the gender dynamics between black men and women at the time when the blues emerges as

³¹⁹ Harrison, *Black Pearls : Blues Queens of the 1920s*, 111.

popular music. Nevertheless, it is important to mention Duval's insight on the epistemic difference present in the blues life world. This discussion of the sensual owes much to Duval-Harrison's insights that correct the male-centered scholarship on the blues which often assume the normative sensuality dynamics of andropocentric heteronormativity in their interpretation of blues subjects. Duval-Harrison's focus on the popularization of the blues woman as an ideal made clear that the blues culture articulated female being in ways that were distinct from Afro-Christian churches and their adoption of middle-class and Victorian ideals of womanhood.³²⁰ Again, our emphasis is on the epistemic difference the blues makes and not necessarily the gendered difference.

An illustration of the blues and its epistemic difference, in distinction from the Afro-Christian imagination of the sensual, is reflected in blues singer Ida Cox's performance of "Wild Women Don't Have the Blues."³²¹ In the song, Cox informs her listeners about the advantages of embracing "wild" living in the face of a world that dominates women by restricting them to sexual, social, and gendered norms of being. She sings:

I've got a disposition of my own,
When my man starts kicking I let him find a new home,
I get full of good liquor, walk the street all night,
Go home and put my man out if he don't act right.
Wild women don't worry,
Wild women don't have the blues.

³²⁰ Class difference between working class black women, and black middle class women was used by Duval-Harrison to demarcate the life world of blues women from the women of Afro-Christian churches and those women of middle class distinction such as Mary Church Terrell and Ida B. Wells. In contrast to Duval Harrison, the focus here is on the blues cosmivision that cannot be fully explained by socio-economic difference.

Difference, here, is understood to be a spatial difference.

³²¹As transcribed in: Harrison, *Black Pearls : Blues Queens of the 1920s*, 111.

You never get nothing by being an angel child,
You'd better change your way and get real wild.
I wanta' tell you something, I wouldn't tell you no lie,
Wild women are the only kind that ever get by.
Wild women don't worry,
Wild women don't have the blues.³²²

In these lyrics, Cox responds to the repression of the woman's perspective in the cultivation of what it means to be a woman. As Womanist scholars have often shown, the patriarchy and heteronormativity of black churches have provided an insufficient pastoral response to the often violent and deadly conditions exacted on black women.³²³ Blues women spoke to these conditions when they sang against Christian adoption of female domesticity and the Victorian ideals of womanhood. The singers warned that allegiance to these ideals provided no guarantee of solace or protection from the double oppression and sometimes triple oppressions of sexism, racism and heteronormativity. Blues women performers popularized the sentiments and activities of those women who articulated different ideals and standards for female living. The insight gleaned from blues women is that the articulation of a different vision of the racialized female is not primarily about the recognition of another substratum of identity constructed against a black American patriarchal heteronormative identity. Rather, the insight is the realization that the meaning of the human person is never fully revealed at any one moment in history. The violence of coloniality and its accomplice, in modern Christian imagination, is its

³²² As transcribed in: *ibid.*

³²³ Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church : A Womanist Perspective*, 141; Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness : The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993), 150-51, 75; Frances E. Wood, "'Take My Yoke Upon You': The Role of the Church in the Oppression of African American Women," in *A Troubling in My Soul : Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, ed. Emilie Maureen Townes and M. Shawn Copeland, Bishop Henry Mcneal Turner/Sojourner Truth Series (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993), 52-55.

ability to impose restrictive and oppressive living conditions through religious, economic, political and social domination. The idea of revelation within Christian theology contributes to coloniality in so far as it is used to justify and naturalize Graeco-Roman and European notions of the person as universal and foundational across all time and space.³²⁴

What has been set out in this chapter is a way towards a decolonial method of theology that proceeds as a reflection on the blues perspective. The decolonial theological interpreter is not after systematization of local or indigenous perspectives on God. Rather, the decolonial theological thinker's task is to participate in a global process of delinking spirituality, the theological imagination, and religiosity from the confines of coloniality. This project is not a paternalistic call from an armchair of the ivory tower, but a response to those who are already on the move, thinking and living from what Mignolo has articulated as the subaltern perspectives of colonial difference. With this in mind, the blues vision of the sensual is representative of a people's recognition that persons cannot be fully explained in any climactic universal way. Interpretation of the sensual and the sensual experience of others is one that can benefit from the delinking of personhood or peoplehood from closed systems of knowledge that render a peoples vision of a person as already given within a foreign epistemology. Blues sensuality is articulated harmoniously, while not the intention of its proponents, with the

³²⁴ Hood, *Must God Remain Greek? : Afro Cultures and God-Talk*, 5-7; Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs : Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, 284-85; Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," in *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, 202-04.

decolonial adage, "I am where I think."³²⁵ This adage speaks to the *lacunae* in Afro-Christian thought recognized by Joseph Washington when he argued,

Those who join a [black] religious community in search of meaning and relevance are thwarted in this quest, not because there is no ultimate belief in God, but because there are no middle guidelines on the way.³²⁶

"The middle ground along the way" is not only the pre-modern Christian tradition as Washington suggested. It is also the knowledge produced from other time/spaces and visions of reality. Nevertheless, cultural production as the repository of these imaginations both determines and is determined by the activity of humans situated in times and spaces. Further, it is important to note that the insight of the blues is not restricted to the past, nor is it confined to the locality of the Delta Region. To help explicate this point and conclude this discussion on the blues and its colonial difference, the remainder of this section will look to place the blues in conversation with Enrique Dussel's idea of trans-modernity. Dussel's insights will help to underscore the dangers of seeing the blues through the lens of regionalism, which confines its meaning to the Delta space and entraps it in yet another ontological stricture.

In a recent article, Enrique Dussel provides some comments on one of his classic works, *A Philosophy of Liberation*.³²⁷ In general, the article reflects on the contribution of the philosophy of liberation to Latin American thought. For Dussel, the philosophy of liberation named the critical location from which Latin American

³²⁵ Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, 91.

³²⁶ Washington, "Are American Negro Churches Christian?," in *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, 98.

³²⁷ Enrique Dussel, "Philosophy of Liberation, the Postmodern Debate, and Latin America Studies," in *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, ed. Mabel Moraña, Enrique D. Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

thought reads the conditions created by late transnational capitalism, its gender norms, and its ever evolving patriarchy. Latin America, in Dussel's thought, is a location in which many persons think from what decolonial and post-colonial theorists articulate as the subaltern experience. The problem that Dussel's thought confronts is the problem of location. Dussel asks, how can we speak about locations without spiraling into a regionalism? Regionalism must be avoided because it raises the idea of difference to an absolute level and provides no option for connectivity amongst the defined differences in humanity. For Dussel, the response to such an impasse is to argue that no space is purely local just as no space is purely foreign.³²⁸

From the Latin American perspective, the idea of revelation perpetrated, as Mignolo observed commenting on Dussel, an imperial difference; a way of differentiating the material reality in a way that Christianizes the basic categories of human life and then applies these assumptions cross culturally,³²⁹ just as Dussel and Mignolo provincialize thinkers such as Levinas, Derrida, Habermas, and others.³³⁰ Theologies from subaltern perspectives can articulate the limits of Schleiermacher, Wesley, and Calvin, and Luther. However, the recognition of the need to provincialize must speak in solidarity with a located vision of life situated beyond the colonial logic of modernity. This type of solidarity exists at the alterity of modernity and is, according to Dussel, "trans-modern." To be trans-modern is to be beyond the epistemological vision of the world that can only produce, rather than

³²⁸ Ibid., 342.

³²⁹ Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs : Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, 176-80.

³³⁰ For Dussel's provincialization of Eurocentric critical thought see: Dussel, "Philosophy of Liberation, the Postmodern Debate, and Latin America Studies," in *Coloniality at Large : Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, 339-43.

recognize, the alterity it creates. However, as Martha Lamas has shown in her work in feminist theory, the subaltern perspectives must be careful not to replicate the colonial conflation of doing and being.³³¹ Such conflation has led to the divisive politics of identity and its replete “identitarianisms.”³³² Caution in the tactical use of identity should be exercised, especially in subaltern contexts where activism and movements for autonomy use ontological discourse in a tactical way. As Lamas warns, via Gayatri Spivak, political strategies are just that—strategies; they are not ontological.³³³

Racialization, gender paradigms, and other imposed colonial identities cannot be surpassed with reformist articulations— not even those that come from the subjugated. As Dussel argues, the challenge for the oppressed is to realize themselves as oppressed. But this realization is not a moment of ontology, but critical activity. Oppression is not a signification of being, but an activity of persons with power and the resultant struggle it places on the oppressed. With the use of the “trans” in trans-modernity, Dussel argues that subaltern life and visions of life are constitutive with, but *other than* modernity. Their otherness is born in alterity and not from an a priori absolutist anthropological predisposition to inferiority. What Dussel provides is a new perspective from which to approach modernity that recognizes the many activities that produce the conditions of the subalterns of Western history. What Dussel signals is the need for not a revision of the modern

³³¹ Lamas, *Feminism : Transmissions and Retransmissions*, 36.

³³² *Ibid.*, 54.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 103. To avoid evoking yet another term I have avoided Spivak’s, “strategic essentialism.” Nevertheless this is what is undergirding Lamas’ idea about how ontologies or essentialisms can work when they are seen as a part of a temporary activity in political strategy.

knowledge, but a shift in perspective and the space from which knowledge speaks. Mignolo, drawing on Dussel, argued that this shift requires a bracketing of the Eurocentric understanding of objectivity. He argued that objectivity cannot be spoken “without parenthesis,”³³⁴ which means that it must remain respective to its location. It cannot be objective for everyone in all times and spaces. Such an activity of enforcing objectivity irrespective of difference is the basis of colonial domination. It is the very logic that empowers the colonial world. In looking at the trans-modern experiences, we are invited to reconsider the geographies enforced upon the Americas by Spanish, Dutch, English and French interests.

The Trans-modern perspective, then, calls for a shift in the “geography of reason” to those geographies that emerge from the perspective of the subjugated. We have referred to this in previous chapters with Mignolo's term, border thinking, Clyde Woods' blues geography, and Giggie's construction of the dynamics of religious imagination in the Delta Region. These insights proceed *after* the spatial analysis of knowledge. The spaces of subaltern knowledge, in our case the Delta Region as imaged by blues people, is not easily constructed into distinct articulations of center and periphery. Rather, what has been submitted here is an articulation of the blues image of the Delta space that emerges from the entanglements of the Native American, Euro-American, and black American images of the Delta Region. Recognition of the entanglements of spatial imagination was not aimed at legitimating yet another identity from which to think about theology.

³³⁴ See my earlier argument in chapter 1 on “objectivity without parentheses.” Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity : Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, 27, 209.

"Blues people" has served as our analytical tool more than an ontological signifier of a people group. Further, the focus on blues people has been aimed not only at exposing the coloniality of Afro-Christian notions of race, but recognizing the "loci of enunciation,"³³⁵ or the imaged space from which the blues speaks. Blues space emerges from both internal and external factors. As Woods argued, the blues vision for life is "arrested." Arrest connotes the restriction of life and the activity of restriction that impacts the spatial arrangements of living. Theological treatments of the blues by James Cone, Kelly Brown Douglas, and John Michael Spencer have undervalued this spatial dimension and have instead privileged the racial experience as the primary way of interpreting the insights of blues people.³³⁶ Such a move exemplifies the coloniality of racial logic that is rooted in the universalization of modern reason. Dussel is critical of this when he writes:

The Critique of modern reason does not allow the philosophy of liberation to confuse it with a critique of reason as such, or with particular types or practices of rationality. On the contrary, the critiques of modern reason is made in the name of a differential rationality and a universal rationality. The affirmation and emancipation of difference is constructing a novel and future universality. The question is not difference or universality but rather universality in difference and difference in universality.³³⁷

With this, Dussel helps to highlight the conflict that emerges between the blues epistemology and the Afro-Christian epistemology at an intraracial level—a level amongst those racialized as black. Those black Americans who hold to the absolute

³³⁵ Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs : Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, 115.

³³⁶ James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues : An Interpretation* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980), 97-127; Spencer, *Blues and Evil*; Douglas, *Black Bodies and the Black Church : A Blues Slant*.

³³⁷ Dussel, "Philosophy of Liberation, the Postmodern Debate, and Latin America Studies," in *Coloniality at Large : Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, 346.

universality of racial identity participate in the suppression of other options for universality. As such, they reflect modern reason in its inability to mediate the conflict between difference and universality without violently creating victims through the flattening and concealment of difference.

The violence of this flattening, as stated above by Linden, amounts to a denial of human life. Clyde Woods articulated the effects of this flattening by his mapping of the Mississippi Plan of development and how it "arrested" the efforts of blues people. The blues people as Woods shows are not only arrested because of the color of their skin but because of their vision for life in relationship to the land. Their cooperative economics, their music, their dance, their politics, and their embrace of the sensuality of their bodies were also under attack, not only by the system of white supremacy, but by an understanding of Christianity appropriated by those who shared their same skin color. That the blues episteme and the Afro-Christian episteme found difficulties co-existing except through binary notions of the sacred and the profane points to the impasse between difference and universality that decolonial theorists approach through reading the intellectual and activist work of the various subalterns of the world.

If black Americans doing theology are to participate in this decolonial work, then it would seem that the construction of race as a unifying idea, as Linden has argued, must be let go. Letting go of race does not mean, as Linden suggests, that we ignore the suffering of those victimized by racism. Nevertheless, it does mean that we must reconsider this suffering as a function of the creation of the Atlantic World which primarily operates by spatial or geographical domination. Cultural

production, in this case via the blues, illumines the areas of life that go unexplored as a mediation of God's self-communication in history. In a trans-local way, the blues is synchronous with the Chicana feminist idea of *cotidianidad* – everyday life.

Lamas' comments in her writings on Chicana feminist theory:

Chiapas reminds us in a brutal way that thought or political project does not have value if it is not concerned with the *cotidianidad* [everyday life, and the everyday quality of our history] and with the suffering of people. Inequality suffered by women, yes, but also indigenous people, peasants, the marginalized, prostitutes, homosexuals, young people this persists in our country without apparent congruence with the development we have reached in many areas...³³⁸

Land, body, and sound in the blues vision for life *dislocates* the coloniality imposed upon it from both the Mississippi Plan of Development and the limited theological imagination of Afro-Christianity. Dislocation signifies both the interstitial location between two spatial visions and the activity that brings greater awareness of the contrasts between the two. While dislocation is not a triumphant overcoming of coloniality, it is an activity that reminds us that the meaning of life is mediated through a plurality of epistemologies and cosmologies. The blues dislocates the force of black churches and their justifications for the employment of racial ideology—an ideology that is more than pragmatic or tactical. As Linden and Washington indicate, racial ideology is leveraged for the pursuit of self-interested access to the Eurocentric modern vision for life and living. With days of worship still the most segregated moments of the Christian life in the U.S., one wonders when we

³³⁸ As quoted in: Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology : Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics*, 165.

will provincialize racial ideology and the ways in which racial ideology over-represents the diversity of life through monochromatic ontologies.

Blues people have paid a tremendous sacrifice as a result of the divisiveness of the ontological and anthropological violence inherent in the coloniality of race. By mining the epistemology that emerges from the life-world of blues people, we can get a glimpse of the coloniality that persists through the ontology of blackness. The blues, then, calls for, points towards and creates a vision of the world connected to the flows and rhythms of everyday life.

The heroes in blues music are not overseers, landowners, politicians or preachers, rather, they are people faced with the conditions born from the desire to live within the forced conditions of the colonial wound. Blues heroes harnessed their desire for love and companionship and wielded it against the psychic condition of being blue. Blues heroes are lovers and love makers, survivors, and witty escape artists. They dodge “the blues as such” at every turn especially those blues born from one’s inability to fit into the restrictive identities of black respectability. As such, blues characters do battle with the devil not only as a metaphysical principle, but as a discursive ontology cast upon their life-ways. Legend amongst them was Peetie Wheatstraw, who was also referred to by his alias, The Devils Son in Law. Peetie Wheatstraw was a character whose history can be traced to blues pianist, William Bunch.³³⁹ While Bunch was not a part of the Delta blues community, he drew heavily from the Delta themes and was often found in many of the record

³³⁹ Garon, *The Devil's Son-in-Law : The Story of Peetie Wheatstraw & His Songs*, 1.

collections of Delta peoples.³⁴⁰ Bunch's stage character became so legendary that many performers took on the Peetie Wheatstraw name for themselves. Long after Bunch's death, performers kept the Peetie Whetstraw persona alive.³⁴¹ As late as the 1970's, the character was often used to justify, hyperbolically, one's capabilities in games, gambling, and courtship.³⁴² For instance, the name of Peetie Wheatstraw would often be evoked in a pool hall to bring attention to one's skills at billiards. In the hopes of placing fear in the heart of their potential opponents, one would say, "I'm Peetie Wheatstraw... the Devil's Son in Law!"³⁴³ Blues people heralded Wheatstraw as hero because of his ability to make it out of precarious circumstances. In light of this discussion on the provincialization of racial ideology, Wheatstraw's blackness was not center stage in what made him legendary, rather, it was his cunning and wit. His masterful ability to confront and cope with the "blues as such."

Wheatstraw then symbolizes the realities of everyday life—the deep vulnerability opened up within the colonial wound of modernity. In Wheatstraw and so many others, we find Marta Lamas' *cotidianidad*, Washington's hope for the "world in-between" humanity and God, Linden's world of the poor, and Césaire's "science of the word." Blues people, through the power of their imaginations, through the vibrations of voices, guitars and pianos, confronted that which *disrupted*

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 113.

³⁴¹ Ibid., 60.

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ Ibid.

their day to day activity of survival—those low-spirits that they signified as “the blues.”

This morning soon, blues was standing in my door.
Please, will you leave here blues ooh please blues don't come here no
more.
Blues, now you know they are bad, they keeps me bothered all the
time.
Now if I don't do something for the blues, ooh well, well,
they gonna make me lose my mind.

Blues is a peculiar thing, they forever on my mind.
Then again if the blues stay with you, my friend, ooh,
Well, well they will always have you crying.
Now, I received a letter, from a girlfriend of mine today.

She said, now, she could do much better, ooh, well, well but I was
always in her way.
Now good-bye, blues, please blue, don't bother me no more.
Blues, now, won't you give me a break, ooh, well,
well please now don't knock at my door.³⁴⁴

Conclusion

What we have left untreated until this moment has been the theological components of revelation that are leveraged as a means of justifying various modern positions. Modernity, as we have discussed, is constitutive with coloniality. Following the substantiation of this statement with what has been set out above, the same is true for modern theology –it too has its constitutive coloniality. Such a statement is an indictment, but the response to this indictment does not necessarily

³⁴⁴ As transcribed by Paul Garon in: *ibid.*, 38. This song is entitled “Blues at My Door” and was recorded in 1934. Like many blues songs “the blues” is personified as an antagonist. The written lyrics only communicate half of the meaning in the song. The sonic elements of the song, rhythm, melody, moans and shouts all work together to communicate triumph rather than absolute despair. As Murray indicates, the music often communicates something counter to the lyrics which often communicate an experience that is unresolved see: Murray, *Stomping the Blues*, 16-17. For blues as a poetic of freedom see: Garon, *Blues and the Poetic Spirit*, 7.

demand an ethical or moral response, nor is it necessarily a call for justice. Morality, justice, and ethics are all situated and grounded in ways of understanding the world, and while they may be helpful along the way, the degree to which they can be helpful is limited by the epistemological and cultural systems to which they respond. Our task has been to make our methodological performance one of listening to the blues as another locus of enunciating knowledge that dislocates the ones mentioned above. Thus far we have listened to the land, to the sonic, and to the sensual that resonate within the blues cosmovision. This cosmovision speaks from within the colonial wound. The constitutive nature of modernity and the colonial wound are the results of an irreversible activity. As a result, the entanglements are too intertwined and are not be disentangled with a verifiable outcome.

This impasse between the world of the blues and the modern world is one that has to do with how we understand the distinction between revelation and knowledge. However, our inquiry cannot stop there because these are located ideas. Therefore, our task has been to look at the space of the blues and to see how the blues space gives us some insight into looking at the spatial dimension of revelation and knowledge. With this in mind, decolonial deconstruction will aim at two dimensions of revelation: knowledge and space.

Knowledge

In his now classic work, *On Job*, Gustavo Gutierrez found, within the book of Job, an experience of the world and God that was parallel to the situation of the peoples of Latin America who were, and still are, suffering under an immense burden of poverty. In his chapter entitled, "My Eyes have Seen You," he presents a

Job character that must learn to counter the idea of retributive justice as a means of speaking about God. ³⁴⁵Now, this is an ironic interpretation because as the story goes, Job was in need of some justice after losing all of his earthly goods, family members, his health, and his peace of mind. Gutierrez reflects this point when he writes:

...what Job was really rejecting was, first, the moral order as presented to him by his theologian friends and, secondly and consequently, the God to who they appealed. If there is no alternative to the doctrine of temporal retribution then for someone who has experienced what Job has experienced, the conclusion is inevitable: the world is indeed a chaos. If the only possible order is the order of justice that his friends proclaim, then Job must become, even against his will, a defender of disorder, because his fate will be the same whether or not he is upright and innocent (Job 9:15-20).³⁴⁶

The lesson learned from Job, according to Gutierrez, is not that he was faithful despite his conditions and was therefore *justly* rewarded. Instead, what Gutierrez wants the people of Latin America to see is that Job remained open to God, and by doing so, it allowed him to have a relational experience with the gratuitousness of God's love. By gratuitousness Gutierrez means that God is free to act.³⁴⁷ Gutierrez's hermeneutics imply that there is no system by which humans gainsay a demand upon God. By the same token humans, like Job, are free to choose to remain open or to confine themselves to systematic confines such as the confine of retribution. The confines of just retribution are represented by the theological position of Job's friends who are sure that Job has done something wrong to warrant such tragic treatment. Gutierrez's insight is that he sees in Job, the condition of the innocent

³⁴⁵ Gutiérrez and O'Connell, *On Job : God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, 82-92.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 84.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 87.

victims of Latin America. As we discussed with Dussel above, the burden facing all the subalterns of the planet is their recognition of their innocence. Like Job, they are not culpable for the pernicious circumstances thrust upon them. But, as Gutierrez asked with so many other liberation theologians in unison with him, how can they speak of God from a place of suffering?

In Job's case, he had to realize that the God of his friends was not a God to whom he could speak. The God of just retribution has no option for Job except the continuance of his desert of suffering. As Gutierrez argues, Job cannot speak of God because the God which he held in common with his friends has already spoken in a climactic way via the tragic conditions in which Job and his family found themselves. As such, there is nothing left. Job should "curse God and die." Nevertheless, as Job comes into consciousness about another way to speak to and about God, he begins to "see." "I once knew you only by hearsay; now my eyes have seen you."

Gutierrez points out that this moment of the encounter, God's self-disclosure to Job, precipitates a radical shift in the thought of Job about how he is to speak of God. Job is no longer within the system of retribution in which there is nothing further to say, but, instead, is within the spiritual posture of being with God. Giving foundation to this theme of being with God, Gutierrez refers to Paul's encounter with God (1 Cor. 13:13), Jeremiah's revelation, in his time of trouble, "the Lord is with me," and the Psalmist: "I shall behold thy face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with beholding thy form" (Ps.17:15). Turning on this biblical theme, Gutierrez contends that the writer's aim with the character of Job is to show the reader that justice, while important, does not have the "the final say about how

we are to speak of God." (87) Rather, it is God's act of showing up that brings forth the opportunity for revelation. It is in this act that God becomes clear enough for Job to endure without the need to speak of retribution. At the moment that the God of Life exposes God's self as Life, living persists. For Gutierrez, this is the moment where the love of God is made known. To this point he writes:

...Yahweh, the God of life, has restored Job to a life that refuses to be imprisoned in a narrow ethical order but rather draws inspiration at every moment from the free and unmerited love of God.³⁴⁸

In his final analysis of the text, Gutierrez holds that justice, compassion, and solidarity with the poor, and all of the effort that these ideals require, only find their meaning in the mystery that is God's love. The mystery rests on the freeness of God to act and our freeness to respond. As Gutierrez argues, if we are too obsessed with our commitment to justice, then justice itself, rather than the mystery of God, becomes the object.³⁴⁹ In the world of the poor, this would, as it was for Job, be a tremendous tragedy as there would be an inability to speak about God without some physical relief from the burden of suffering. The witness of Job is his realization that God is present and recognizable despite the limitations of suffering.

While this dissertation has endeavored to deal with the world of the poor via their cultural production rather than their poverty, Gutierrez's point is significant with regards to how he understands the knowledge of revelation. While simple, the implications for revelational knowledge are far reaching. God is love, and God is free in God's activity of loving. God is Life, and God is free in God's activity of sustaining

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 90.

³⁴⁹ Is this not what we have argued earlier with the problem of being and doing and Gayatri Spivak's warning that essentialisms should remain strategic?

life. Wherever there is life, wherever there is the experience of love and joy, no matter how temporary or fleeting, there is enough to recognize that God is present. Gutierrez's "poor" are analogous to the story of Job in that God chooses the most tragic figure on which to bestow God's presence. What this dissertation has offered is that the blues people of the Delta Region are in line with the conditions that produce Job as a tragic figure and, therefore, tell us something about the quality of God's love. This quality is a quality recognizable in their organizing activity around the land, their creativity around the sonic, and their sensuality around the body. In the land, in the Sonic, in the body they saw presence—enough presence to give them the ability to keep on. While all blues people did not call this presence God by a name, they recognized it was a presence in which they wanted to abide. Heard in their vernacular, seen in their style of dress, and felt in the moans and shouts of voices and guitar strings, are the signs of their decision to abide with a particular presence.

The blues perspective, like Gutierrez's presentation of the perspective of the poor, is a perspective that challenges the commonly held way of looking at the conditions of life. From this perspective, one can claim that something "else" is at work. There is something else that can inspire us to speak or find a voice from which to speak. These activities tell us about the quality of the knowledge transferred in revelation. The quality of this form of revelational knowledge rests on a principle that there is something more in God— a free, open and infinite mystery that defies discourse. As it defies discourse, it defies the language, symbols, and meaning that are integral to discourse. Nevertheless, Gutierrez's option leaves something

untreated. It does not yet get at one of the problems that situated the trajectory of this work, the problem of space. Space is a significant problem within the blues perspective because of the fundamental experience of dislocation by blues people from the space of Africa.

Space

As indicated several times throughout this work, the dislocation of Africans through enslavement presents a complication within the religious imagination, especially as it has to do with space. Namely, how does one enunciate themselves when dislocated from all of the material reality that provides the content from which one can speak? Dislocation is not a burden for Job. But, for all those peoples who were stuffed into the hulls of slave ships and taken from the places from which they knew, dislocation would be an enormous burden-- a burden also shared by those who would confront them in the Americas.

This dislocation, I argue, has been undertreated as a problem of space in the theological imagination. Thus far we have shown that this has been resultant from the problem of racial ideology and its use in the overrepresentation of experience. In such a setting, redemption from racial suffering and black theodicy begin to overrun the many ways that people experience the reality and, therefore, overrun the options for different mediations of revelation. For blues people, this is not simply a matter of skin, but a matter of spatial vision. In the blues, we learn, similar to the Job story, that one's dislocation does not have the last word. The Middle Passage is a significant moment in the history of dislocation. The significance of dislocation is resultant from the fact that it disconnects the many peoples of West Africa and those

others who suffered the horrors of enslavement as indentured servants and slaves, from the ability to experience indigeneity. In the mark of the black skin, peoples are recognized as not being (they were signified as inhuman non-beings) in the place where they are located as well as not living in the place where their ancestors lived indigenously. In this light, the location of black skinned ethnicities in the Americas is a locality that is fundamentally dislocated. Their racialization is constitutive of the historical event of dislocation and, as Quijano argues, they were racialized for the purpose of restricting them to a particular type of labor, wage earning chattel. Chattel slavery added to the problem of dislocation, but it was always a function of it. However, in the modern/colonial world, social roles based on skin color and levels of domination and exploitation would eventually set the foundation for mostly all social relationships. As the most valuable dominated class, those racialized as blacks were victimized through violent methods of entrapment.

Liberation theologies from Latin America are critiqued for ignoring both indigenous peoples and those dislocated African ethnic groups that made the Middle Passage. Some of the critiques have come from those that argue that many of the Latin American theologians were not sensitive to the experience of blackness that supposedly characterizes enslaved racialized African ethnic groups (and their descendants). Here lies the impasse between black theologies and those theologies of Latin America with their eyes on the world of the poor. Had black theologies been focused on the idea of space (location and dislocation) and epistemological hegemony rather than racial experience, then their critique of Latin American theology would have been decisive and helpful rather than divisive. Such a claim is

not one of arrogance but one that draws from the well of those third and fourth generation Latina/o/x liberation theologians who make similar critiques.³⁵⁰ Rather than revelation functioning as something that draws us beyond systems, it has instead functioned as a justification for affirming ideological understandings of identity or, at best, strict essentialist notions of experience. And for what? Participation in institutional systems founded in racial categories of domination! Just as we have argued through Gutierrez's commentary on Job, there must be courage to remain open to the gratuitousness of the reality which remains ineffable and beyond systematization.

James Noel's focus on non-being is instructive in this regard. His explication of the moan, as the fundamental response to dislocation, reinterprets the Middle Passage experience not as a transition from ethnicity to racialized being, but one from a location in the reality of God to one of dislocation from the reality of God. In the slave ship, the quality of the locality that speaks for God is so unspeakable that the only thing that is utterable as mediation is the moan. In the slave ship, no materiality is recognizable as God. No sound that rumbles is familiar, safe, warm, loving, or caring. Emptiness and an unknowable, unspeakable vulnerability, stench,

³⁵⁰ I have in mind here Nestor Medina's critique of the latina/o/x usage of the mestizaje with a disregard for the implicit cultural biases, nationalisms, and the diversity amid the different types of racialization. His work is critical of an uncritical use of mestizaje as an empty category from which to signify certain racial mixings and their meaning. For more on Medina see: Medina, *Mestizaje : (Re) Mapping Race, Culture, and Faith in Latina/O Catholicism*. Also in mind here is Marcella Althaus-Reid's Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology : Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics*. Where she is critical of what she sees as the heteronormativity and phallocentrism in Liberation Theology. See also: Marcella Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology : Readings on Poverty, Sexual Identity and God* (London: SCM Press, 2004). Lastly, I have in mind here Ivan Petrella's *Beyond Liberation Theology : A Polemic, Reclaiming Liberation Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2008). Here he critiques an over dependency on materialist Marxism in Liberationist Theologies towards broadening the liberationist project without the Marxian pessimisms concerning social and economic alternatives in latino/a/x American scholarship.

vomit, and feces persist. People are located in excrement. Their limbs are restricted and shackled. They are weighted down by chains and forced to dance against their will. Their ears are flooded with the sound of the cracking of the whip and the beats of the drum that does not speak the name of the God but the rules of the masters and their mistresses. The feeling of penetration from forced entries of rape persist, and not just once but over and over again. The objectification of one's body at the service of the enslaver's libidinal will is common. The slaveship is a dislocation. It is the space from which one must speak to the gods. The space where one must find the words. Finding the words does not rest, as it was for Job, in the courage to leave the God of retribution behind, rather, for the enslaved it rests in leaving the God of dislocation behind. Now, this places us back at our starting point between the theology of Divine Racism (William R. Jones) and the epistemological hegemony of the Graeco-Roman metaphysics (Robert Hood). Neither addresses the spatial victimization of the U.S. black American.

The question, "Is God a White Racist?", while convincing as a critical apparatus, has another radical step to go. Is God a dislocater? For without dislocation, the problem of Divine Racism has no history from which it can ask of God, "why?" It has no history because history takes place in time and space. Race and its ideological analogs have none. No time or space. They are as vacuous as the lungs that breathe them into being via discourse. They are empty signifiers that have no meaning except those interested remain interested in their signifying power. But, space is a whole other thing, space connects with the idea of the land, an

ecological arrangement where the exchange of basic organic elements between species gives rise to cycles of life, death, transformation, and resurrection.

When the enslaver dislocates the enslaved from their land, and the enslaved are confined in an unknown space, the enslaved lose touch with their familiar imaginative capacities. One's connection and familiarity with space are integral to their imagination. After all, look at what came out of the imagination of a Europe that saw itself as unbound by space. All that is described above. As Du Bois so powerfully said in response to the tragedies of a war-torn Europe, "... *this is Europe.*" Du Bois' point, of course, was to question the shock and alarm over the war in Europe when Europe had waged war on indigenous peoples in the Americas and Africa for centuries prior—a war that continues to change its form but wages on for the sake of maintaining systems of exploitation. Revelation, then, must acknowledge that the knowledge that it mediates is not a license to dominate space but to remain radically open to all cohabitants in a given space. This point about cohabitation within space is significant and calls for constructive work in regards to the sources and mediation mechanisms that are currently assumed in the doctrine of revelation. We will return to this point in greater detail in the conclusion to this chapter. For now, suffice it to say that scripture, ecclesiology, and the current theological treatments of non-Christian faiths, can be substantively impacted from insights gained from the general attention to space and the specific focus on the blues and the Delta Region.

This withstanding, revelation is not a justification for Imperialistic takeovers of the earth to bring everyone under the "Loving God." revelation is not a knowledge

of the earth that grants us the "objectivity" to become cartographers of God's absence. Can any part of God's creation be *absolutely* absent from God? Centuries of Christian mission says to us, yes. The revisions of positivistic transcendental notions of revelation as knowledge do not undo or approach this issue of space. For theirs was only to correct theological rationality in the face of the Enlightenment. Those indigenous peoples of the Americas and those from the coasts of West Africa, some enslaved and others colonized in their homes, were left to deal with this fundamental coloniality— this long duration of dislocation. In the indigenous regeneration of their traditional spiritualities, the vibrations of the blues guitar, the many narratives of the wandering workers and self-organizing labor clans, the unapologetic embrace of sensuality and sexuality, and blues dance, people are envisioning and living out visions of how they want to be in space and in time. Such visions show the gratuitousness of realities that leans toward life despite the forced conditions that often attempt to squeeze life out.

Constructive Implications

As stated above, the spatial analysis that assists in both recovering and implementing the blues epistemology is one that has a particular import to constructive proposals for rethinking how scripture, the Church, and non-Christian religions work to mediate revelation and how these mediations influence epistemological and discursive processes. This concluding section will consider the above mediations of revelation and how the blues epistemology and decolonial spatial criticism assists in the constructive work that lay beyond the primary scope

of this text. First, let us consider scripture since we have ended our discussion above with the book of Job and scripture is still close in the mind.

The blues epistemology suggests that the biblical text should be read with an eye toward the plurality of intrabiblical and extrabiblical epistemologies and cosmologies. As seen in our brief treatment of Mississippi Marvel's interpretation of the Psalmists call to "make a joyful noise," the blues perspective worked to decenter the Afro-Christian codification of sound which was based on a particular revelation that revealed the guitar and its sonic resonances as demonic. Marvel's knowledge of the blues life world allowed him to resist such notions of the demonic because of his sensual perception of the goodness and transcendental bent in the blues sound. He notes this by saying the blues guitarist can say Hallelujah with their stringed instrument. Moving from appreciation to critical engagement with multiple epistemic spaces contributes to the life of the biblical text in ways that can refresh and transform traditional reception histories and their respective spatial and epistemic boundaries. Also, the blues epistemology and decolonial spatial critique can assist the faithful to develop a critical eye towards epistemic differences that are suppressed within and through the use of the biblical canon.

An example of how engagement with extra-ecclesial epistemic boundaries can influence how the text is read and received is Marcella Althaus-Reid's focus on the indecent in her biblical hermeneutics. As a result of her experiences in brothels, Homosexual, Gay, Bisexual, Lesbian, Transgender, Queer (HGBLTQ) nightclubs, and other spaces, normatively known as indecent (non-normative epistemic space), she was better able to recognize the double suppression of those that are signified as

indecent within the biblical text. The “indecent,” Althaus-Reid argued, were prostitutes, slave women, lepers, and those with issues of blood. The indecency of the conditions of these characters prompts one type of repressive alienation, and their social and economic disparities prompts another. These types of suppression, as biblical scholar Avaren Ipsen has recently shown, via Rita Nakashima Brock, are resultant from a substructure of religious ideology that dislocates the indecent, such as sex workers and their clients, within the Biblical World. Further, Ipsen contends, via Gabriela Leite, that the exegesis of the perspective of the prostitute in the biblical text is a necessary work in getting at the historical underpinnings of contemporary problems at the intersection of prostitution, sex work, and Christian faith.

By recovering the prostitutes in the text as *fully human*, rather than *fully indecent* and in need of redemption, the scholars above deconstruct the ideological use of the Bible as a tool of sexual regulation and a basis for the criminalization of prostitution and sex work.³⁵¹ Further, the expansion of tradition and scripture should also take heed from those biblical scholars who read the biblical text with hermeneutical lenses cultivated from their commitments to peoples who suffer immensely under the weight of coloniality. Of mention here is Randall Bailey’s work in Biblical Criticism that has been undervalued most tragically by black theologians and womanist scholars because of his very high criticism of the ways in which scholars, clergy, and the faithful, from marginalized perspectives, internalize their oppression to save the authority of the text. One example of Bailey’s approach is an article in which he substantiates the Prophet Moses as an Egyptian leader of class

³⁵¹ Avaren Ipsen, *Sex Working and the Bible, Bible world* (London: Equinox Pub., 2009), 1-3.

struggle rather than a Levite. Such a reading deconstructs the normative reading of the text which corroborates God's election of Israel. In a subversive fashion, that finds synergy with the blues sensibility put forth above, Bailey exposes the Anti-African sentiments that are hidden by the Exodus writers' stylistic and ethnic commitments. Bailey's argument for Moses' African genealogy is also leveraged by the fact that scholars from other disciplines in ancient studies have substantiated arguments which would suggest that the portrayal of Moses' Levite lineage are likely influenced by commitments to literary continuity and cultural aggrandizement. As Bailey notes, readings that substantiate a Levite Moses miss an opportunity to recognize inter-ethnic coalition (between Egyptians and Levites) against Imperialism and African mediations of God's revelation through Scripture.³⁵² Lastly, regarding scripture, the emergent blues cosmology that illumines a perspective on the sanctity of the land, the sonic and the sensual as a collective, provides an extrabiblical text from which to reflect on God's self-disclosure in history. In a world where media is abundant, the biblical text need not be the only source of revelation.³⁵³

³⁵² For Bailey's points see: Randall C. Bailey, "Is That Any Name for a Nice Hebrew Boy?' - Exodus 2:1-10: The De-Africanization of an Israelite Hero.," in *The Recovery of Black Presence: An Interdisciplinary Exploration*, ed. Randall C. Bailey and Jacquelyn Grant (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 25-36. For more of Bailey's method see: Bailey, "The Danger of Ignoring One's Own Cultural Bias in Interpreting the Text," in *The Postcolonial Bible*; Randall C. Bailey, Tat-Siong Benny Liew, and Fernando F. Segovia, *They Were All Together in One Place? : Toward Minority Biblical Criticism, Semeia Studies* (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2009). Also along these lines is the work of Asian American Biblical Scholar Tat-Siong Benny Liew who has recognized how Asian American histories and inter-racial, inter-ethnic, trans-national spaces, and experiences shed new light on narratives within the biblical text. For more on Liew see: Tat-Siong Benny Liew, *What Is Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics? : Reading the New Testament, Intersections : Asian and Pacific American Transcultural Studies* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008); Tat-Siong Benny Liew, *Politics of Parousia : Reading Mark Inter(Con)Textually, Biblical Interpretation Series* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

³⁵³ The Catholic Church has discussed this as the complementarity between scripture and tradition. Tradition, according to Dei Verbum, includes insight from contemplation and spiritual experiences

Secondly, the blues epistemology and the decolonial critique of spatial imaginations, have constructive implications for Ecclesial life. As underscored by the antiauthoritarian lyrics within blues music, the blues epistemology warns against local activities of ecclesiological imperialism and epistemic apartheid. The maintenance and construction of institutional churches should be guided by an obligation to rethink foundational commitments to restrictive ontologies such as the secular/sacred binary. Further, the institutional activities of churches must continually work to “delink” from coloniality and the repression of non-Eurocentric life-ways. Contemporary questions concerning sex, reproduction, sexuality and gender in the life of church communities, should also recognize that major cosmological and epistemological differences can inform how gender, sex, and sexuality are mediated at the intersection of culture. Further, and understated in this work, is the notion of human and civil rights, the various claims to these rights, and the systems of jurisprudence that uphold the rights of citizens. Too often these rubrics are espoused by institutional churches in ways that are inconsiderate of epistemic and spatial differences. One instance of this is the current laws concerning the use of excessive force by police officers, against unarmed citizens, especially those citizens of color. Many churches issued public statements urging their congregants and the community at large to comply with any arresting officer, not to resist arrest, and to be as docile and passive as possible. These statements were

amongst believers and the sayings of Church Fathers. Together, both tradition and scripture “make up a single sacred deposit of God.” The suggestion being made here is that the blues epistemology and decolonial spatial critique assist in expanding how this complementarity between scripture and tradition can be broadened. See: Vatican Council II, “*Dei Verbum*,” in *Vatican Council II : The Basic Sixteen Documents : Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations : A Completely Revised Translation in Inclusive Language* ed. Austin Flannery (Northport, N.Y.: Costello Pub. Co., 1996), 102-03.

often disconnected from the spaces from which the Black Live Matter uprising emerged. As such, class, gender, sexuality, and political differences were often flattened and suppressed under the public relations rhetoric of black churches looking to exact their power over the national image of black identity. Also, many church based moralists urged Black Lives Matter protestors to refocus their agenda on instances of black on black crime. While more space is needed to substantiate all of this, the point here is that churches and church leaders refused to see the difference between their ideals of morality and the position of organized activists working towards the fulfillment of their own agenda. As Marcela Althaus-Reid would argue, the Black Lives Matters protestors have been used by some churches and liberationists to represent “indecent.” As such, the moral positions of churches are coopted by media outlets to shame publically the slain, their families, and their communities along moral lines.

These dynamics have proven dangerous as moral behavior has not always proven to protect people from state sanctioned death, nor has it guaranteed just jurisprudence for such atrocities. While the case of the Black Lives Matter movement is begging a response from ecumenical and interreligious coalitions, these groupings must exercise an extreme caution and remain sensitive to other knowledges. A greater attention can inform this type of caution to the varied performances of coloniality within and beyond the institutional lives of faith based organization. Cultural productions, such as the blues, can assist in this effort by providing starting points for sustained activities of epistemic exchange and opportunities for the experience of extra-ecclesial revelations. The analytic of

coloniality and subaltern perspectives can help to expand Christian tradition towards a recognition of diverse experiences of dislocation and isolation. In a paper given at a conference on Caribbean Theology, Gerald Boodoo recently argued that the experience of dislocation that links the multiple people groups in the Caribbean should be harnessed in creative ways to serve as a unifying locality from which to consider the insights of Vatican II concerning revelation. Without this embrace of dislocation and the “eclecticism” that emerges from the involuntary grouping of multiple perspectives within the Caribbean, Caribbean theology would fail to disrupt the imperial forms of Christianity which leverage dislocation and its variety as an opportunity to impose order and domination. To this point he writes:

Eclecticism has been traditionally criticized because its transgression of disciplinary boundaries seemed to not allow for continuity and consistency in theory and thought. However, since we [Caribbean Peoples] have come to realize that “continuity” and “consistency” are oftentimes synonymous with control and domination I think we have become aware that what has passed for “sound method” is itself based on discontinuous and inconsistent theory that maintains and perpetrates domination. Eclecticism in fact is more consistent and grounded in the nature of involuntary associations that make up human living.³⁵⁴

The universality that undergirds ecumenism must seek to be reexamined and expanded to treat, as Dussel argued, “...the diversity in universality and the universality of diversity.” With this recognition, histories that were suppressed by certain interpretations and abuses of tradition can be unmasked not only towards liberation, but towards expanding the content of Christian tradition. As discussed

³⁵⁴ Gerald Boodoo, “Transgressive Theology or Transgressing Theology?,” *Voices* XXXVI, no. 1 (2013): 222.

above via Althaus-Reid's reflection on the "indecent," the production of theological options forces us to accept with radical courage the epistemic space of those deemed to be worthless and unsalvageable.

Boodoo has also reflected as much with his focus on the abyss or, as Bob Marley would say, the "Bottom Less Pit." The abyss in Boodoo's theology is the space *created by* dislocation, often referred to in Rastafarianism as Babylon. In the abyss, one experiences a deep sense of alterity away from all that is familiar. In a tragic irony, however, this is what gives way to possibilities for grace, however small or fleeting they might be. Our treatment of blues people finds synergy with Boodoo's "abyss" and Althaus-Reid's "indecent," especially with regard to the tradition of Afro-Christianity and its suppression of blues music and the blues life-way. What we saw in the Delta Region was a failure of ecumenical activity to embrace the deep abyss and the radical modes of indecency, present in the blues people. This lack of embrace further alienated blues people to a zone of alterity that has yet to be engaged for its constructive contributions to the Afro-Christian interpretations of scripture and tradition. To this missed opportunity in Afro-Christian history I ask, "If atheism, Black Nationalism, surrealism, workers movements, black feminists, womanists, musical artists, and aesthetic interpreters from all over the planet have found expansive revelatory epistemologies—if not God's self-disclosure—within the blues, then why can't the Church?"

Closest to the focus of this work and our final constructive recommendation is the ongoing question of interreligious dialogue. As we have discussed in chapters three and four, the repression of the more fluid expressions of the conglomerate

known as black American culture was codified in increasingly restrictive ways as black Americans negotiated their relationships with Occidental civilization. The repression of the blues' attempt to sustain and reimagine more fluid cosmological expressions exemplifies how slavish allegiances to theological primacies in the doctrine of revelation often degenerate into violent oppressions against life and living. In situations such as the Delta Region where poverty is exacerbated by a plantation style extraction economy, agricultural and industry workers are exploited, indigenous life-ways of the Mississippian peoples are pugnaciously erased and suppressed, and women and HGBLTQ persons of non-European descent bear multiple burdens exacerbated by sexism and heterosexism. Under these sufferings of the "forced context," theologically backed commitments (via revelation) to racial and gender ideologies prove to be divisive and at cross-purposes with efforts to build the basic organization needed to sustain life. These types of theologically legitimated ontologies are constructs that have degenerated into idolatrous objects. These idolatrous objects, and tragically so, have served as foundations for ecumenical and interreligious alliances towards a collective activity that ignores subaltern voices, their respective visions, and their activities of living.

The blues vision for cooperative economics and workers' self-management, and the Mississippian indigenous life-ways that prove to be less damaging to the life of the surrounding ecosystems, are voices that have yet to be considered as options for the ecumenical and interreligious coalition. I submit that ecumenical and interreligious projects must heed the challenge from the decolonial turn if they have any hope of salvaging the integrity in their confessions of the God of Life, which is in

disrepair because they strive after resolutions that continue to reinscribe coloniality and the “well-being” of the modern project. Further, I also submit that ecumenical and interreligious efforts should place the concerns of subaltern peoples above their many proxy wars for epistemological and political power. These proxy wars create false fronts against hyperbolic projections about post-modernism, Marxism, Post-Colonialism, New Age Religion, the Radical Left, Islam, and the supposed syncretisms at the intersections of Christianity and traditional indigenous religions. Of particular mention as well is the current Black Lives Matter movement that has produced all sorts of ecumenical disturbances amongst so called black and white churches and their leaders. The response of churches to the Black Life Matters movements from across racial lines, from the perspective rendered here, amounts to a retrogression, at best, and a continuance at worst, of the long struggle against racial ideology. At the intersection of state sanctioned violence, via law enforcement, and disproportionate policing of people of color, ecumenical and inter-religious dialogues can draw on the history of the blues to better understand how ecclesial commitments to divisive colonial ontologies produce confrontations over power that masquerade as substantive theological disagreement. For example, churches committed to racial ideology as a proper boundary for ecclesial life refuse substantive reconciliation while remaining in agreement on almost all theological matters. Their mutual commitment to racial ideology and cultural autonomy often supersedes the need to coalesce their talents to approach issues concerning the overall welfare of the community at large.

Deconstruction of the coloniality that drives these divisions is a project that may prove worthy for ecumenical and interreligious coalitions. Without a commitment to the provincializing racial ideology, U.S. ecclesial communities will never be able to place their focus on building substantial solidarity with trans-racial and inter-racial coalitions. Some of these potential coalition projects include the recovery and regeneration of indigenous life-ways; finding options for indigenous coastal communities displaced by coastal erosion, restorative options for genocides against indigenous peoples, black American self-determination, poverty in Appalachia and other zones of Euro-American poverty. Not to mention other world issues such as the Israeli Palestinian conflict, and efforts against radical authoritarian nationalisms such as Boko Haram, Isis and the Drug Cartels in the Latin American World, just to name a few. Further, persons of multiple faiths committed to issues concerning women's health and reproduction can find within the blues a radical critique of the external management of women's bodies that is critically instructive. Those critical of the abuses of interfaith and ecumenical coalition for the leveraging of political power over and against women and their decision making capacities concerning their bodies will find in the blues an emergent vision of female agency. Blues women radically resisted the domination of their humanity with wit, cunning and in some cases with their "fours and fives" (euphemism for a .45 caliber pistol). The insight of blues women is born from their trust in their own epistemic wells which were shared amongst blues people at large. From their wells of knowing, which were informed by the pains and sufferings of everyday life in a "forced context," they produced a fortitude to carve out spaces for

their agency and autonomy. From blues people in general and blues women, in particular, interreligious coalitions may be inspired to open their boundaries to consider the revelatory insights of non-religious groupings. From this consideration, they may find sources for dislocating the Eurocentric anxiety over the rise of secularism and “post-modernity.”

Without this commitment to extra-religious revelations, the living history of revelation will starve itself from the well of human cultural and epistemological difference. For it is in the appreciation and engagement with the many and varied life-ways that life finds its ability to flourish and regenerate. In this openness to those that are seemingly unconcerned with the matters of faith, subaltern colonial differences such as the blues can become alternative foci for building solidarity, albeit across many challenges in various “forced contexts.” In all, the sources for revelation discussed here should remain under a scrutiny that is spatially aware of the imperial and colonial implications of revelation. The major suggestion of this body of work is that the blues epistemology is a gift of spatial awareness at the border of a racially signified alterity. This gift of the blues, as so many other gifts from those that endure the perniciousness of coloniality, are too often hidden behind authoritarian universals that at their root remain against life—life otherwise.

In the blues world, there is no cheap justification or rationality for trusting that life in the Delta (the abyss) will outstrip death. To hold to hope that one might cheat the malicious death perpetrated by the plantation is seemingly the most irrational thing one can think in the face of so much misery. Yet, from the abyss,

someone as life-giving as Son House rises in moans and shouts. Something Divine peaks through, and the blues people shout back, "Oh he is gone!" absent and dislocated in a flash of spirit. "Gone" to an unspeakable love he called "Baby." He *was gone* to a place of revelation—a place that speaks through his hands sliding across the strings. In sound, he traveled backward in time past the moan of the slaver's ship and to the space of free relation with land, time, space and God. In his vibration, there is a revelation familiar to all who remember its rhythms and tones. While he was "gone," he never went too far, after all, he was preaching – preaching the blues.

Conclusion

Blues people and their image of the space of the Delta Region, I submit, exist from an alterity that is overshadowed by the racial ideology of blackness. This ideology is part and parcel of the modern/colonial world and is adopted into the Afro-Christian theological imagination of revelation. Both envisioned groupings, Afro-Christian, and blues people, however, are situated in a greater alterity within U.S. American culture at the turn of the 20th century. This shared alterity is a product of their racialization as black. The ideological notion of racial grouping has led to challenges in interpreting difference at the intra-racial level. Hermeneutical challenges persist because of the many ways varied forces of coloniality dominate the Delta Region and the views of its many interpreters. Without a substantive critique of the ways in which the Delta Region was occupied and racialized by the global market interests that *produced* the West, the blues are typically veiled behind the colonial, Christian (Western Imperial Christendom), and Afro-Christian motifs that flatten difference along racial lines.

Through a utilization of decolonial concepts, global design, border thinking, the colonial difference, coloniality, decoloniality and the overrepresentation of Man, we have managed to excavate politics of revelation. The politics of revelation are observable primarily because of the historical activity left behind by those driven by their particular interpretation of God's self-disclosure and the knowledge that it makes known. These politics, in general, have gone under-theorized, especially in the U.S. setting, as many disciplines of thought are governed by the colonial logics we have set out in this work. Implementation of decolonial analyses was not meant

to exclude theological analysis. Rather, the point was to assist in shifting the geography from which theology speaks. Such a shift is not arbitrary but an act of solidarity with those who live in the geographic alterity produced by the modern and European global designs of the world. Decolonial theory substantiates this shift as a historical set of activities that exist in the relationships between the colonial world and the modern world. To say that the world Europe imaged is the modern/colonial world is not an abstract characterization. Riffing on Arius we could say, "There was a time when the modern/colonial world was not." Nevertheless, the existence of the modern/colonial world is not an ontological statement about being. Rather, it is a statement about the arrangements and activities experienced by those whose humanity was harnessed by Europe as the raw material by which to imagine and implement logics, anthropology, gender, politics, sociology, biology, technology, economics, hermeneutics and so much more within the project of modernity. But decolonial thinking is more than a theory. As Mignolo has suggested, decolonial perspectives shift the geography of reason and rethink Descartes' "I think therefore I am," and replaces it with a more geographically aware phrase, "I am where I think." Such a phrase is more than a rhetorical turn of phrase because it dislocates Descartes and reveals his epistemology as alien. Eurocentric Christian theology must undergo this same alien status and recognize that it too must be aware of itself as an alterity. This alterity relates to the modern rise of secularity, which as Torres argues, has its roots in Imperial/Colonial Christendom. Further, it is an alterity created by the epistemic and spatial differences relative to the indigenous peoples of the Americas, Africa, Europe, India, Australia, the Caribbean and elsewhere. As we

learned with the insights of Charkrabarty, Eurocentric theology must be provincialized.

What we have shown in chapters one and two is that the Eurocentric theological imagination has participated in designing the world as the theater of its imagination of space. We noted, via Mignolo, that Europe is a local history that has spilled over its boundaries of life to *design* the globe. Global design and the dynamics signified in the term name this globalization process. However, decolonial theorists have not been alone with helping to sketch out the space of blues production, we have also drawn on the critical geography of Clyde Woods, the populist or peoples history of Steven Hahn, the environmental history of Mikko Saikku and the religious history of John Giggie.

With the above thinkers, we have been able to take a step closer to the space that produces the blues. Our articulation unlike many other interpretations of the blues did not begin with the end of the Civil War, but with the late Holocene period. For this is the period that produced the literal soil out of which the blues would be born. Had the earth of the Delta Region not been at one point covered over with a body of water and then subject to the yearly floods produced by the Mississippi River, the blues might have never been born. Without the non-human activities of the environment the richness of the soil that brought European economic interests, the extermination of the Mississippian peoples, a system of enslavement, the subsequent systems of sharecropping, tenant farming, and other systems of economic exploitation might have never come in contact with the Delta Hardwood Forests.

In the treatment of environmental history, we aimed to decolonize the view of the Delta Region with two decisive moves. First, we gave voice to the earth itself, its flora and fauna and the cycles of the planet that sustained indigenous peoples and their culture for thousands of years before the invasion of European settler colonialism. What has gone undertreated is the dynamic of the Mississippian cosmovision and how it contributed such a small impact on the flora and fauna of the Delta Hardwood Forests in comparison to the settlers and colonial periods of European eco-history. Placing the land and environment at the center of the discussion allowed us to see the material effects on the environment that separate the Mississippian visions for life from the European. The work in Chapter 2 substantiates what we have designated as the colonial wound and deconstructs the reduction of the Delta Region into a space purely determined by the implementation of the racial, political and economic imaginations of the representative governments of the Confederacy and the Union.

Recognizing the beginnings of the enormous wound left behind by the genocide and forced migration of the Mississippian peoples, Clyde Woods' critical blues Geography helped to situate the story of those Africans who were forcibly enslaved and brought to the Delta Space. Echoing the insights of historians such as Steven Hahn and Vincent Harding, Woods gives us a picture of the geographical imagination of the newly emancipated black Americans living in the Delta from 1865- 1930's. From Woods' insights coupled with Giggie's and Hahn's attention to the self-organizing strategies around Christianity and labor (respectively), we can see that the blues emerges within a series of entanglements that pivot on the

erasure of the Mississippian peoples and their vision of the land as a subject rather than an object. From the Mississippian perspective, the loggers and planters who attempted to leverage the fertile soils and hardwoods of the Delta were committing a sacrilege of the highest order. Those capital driven agriculturalists from Europe who organized what Woods defined as the Mississippi Plan of Development are representative of a different epistemological basis from which to relate to the land. After 1865, recently emancipated peoples known throughout this work as Black Americans were not simply idle bystanders to this epistemological shift of the Mississippi Plan. They too had plans and moved to organize themselves under their own cultural, political, and religious imagination.

What our work shows is that the distinguishability of the blues cosmivision and epistemology rests in the differences visible in the activity of formerly enslaved black Americans. These differences are not a matter of the diversity of black identity. Rather these differences are a matter of epistemological and cosmological differences trying to emerge after the flattening and destruction of ethnicity and epistemological differences in the middle passage and through the system of enslavement. In Chapter 3 we communicated that at least three things are distinguishable amongst the grouping that we have named "blues people": their activity in relationship to the land, their sonic creativity, and their creative sensuality. These activities counter-state the activities of the Afro-Christian church and its adoption of the Western Christian vision for life and living. Further, what Chapter 3 has shown is the blues world that unveiled itself when the ideology of

race is bracketed from the task of reading history, especially the history of revelation and its use as a basis for knowledge.

The final chapter, Chapter 4, has shown that the blues people and their vision for life pushes against the coloniality. This coloniality is integral to an Afro-Christian outlook which leveraged the revelation to justify a programmatic way of life exclusive of the blues life way. As Woods has shown, the development of the blues cosmivision was arrested. Such a statement, we have shown, is theological in nature in so far as the revelation of God in scripture and the activity of Jesus was used by Afro-Christians to demonize the blues and the activities associated with it as sinful. In this move, Afro-Christianity imposed a codification of black American culture that defied the differences through imposing a binary theological imagination. The sonic production that came from the creativity of blues guitarist, singers, and other musicians was no longer seen as life affirming under the gaze of the Afro-Christian outlook. Instead, much of black American culture including slave religion and the blues were sacrificed at the altar of legitimating blackness in the eyes of the nation-state and its modern cultural sensibilities. As our reflections on the theological insights on Phillip Linden and Joseph Washington have shown, Afro-Christian churches adopted racial organization as a strategy for equality, at first, and then projected it as a justifiable ontology from which to build a “civilized” black race through institutional organization, morality, and the enforcement of pious living. These strictures replicated the colonial logics that were exacted on the enslaved. While the intentions of these actions may have been benevolent, their results have proven to be problematic. Similar to Robert F. Hood and William R. Jones, our

theological interlocutors for chapter one, we have found an axis on which to situate our theological inquiry into the problem of coloniality. Hood's axis was culture and the problem of cultural hegemony. His question must God remain Greek signaled theological work towards an African and Caribbean cultural basis from which to speak about God.

On the other hand, Jones' axis is theodicy. He asks, "Is God a White Racist?" Undertreated in this work is the thought of womanists who ask a similar question on the dual axis of gender and race. Although we have treated gender and race from the blues woman's perspective, the theological articulation of the axis on which Womanism is situated could have been discussed further. The same could be said for the axis on which queer theology has situated its focus in trying to articulate the queerness within the theological imagination. Although in an abbreviated form, Chapter 4 sought to add to the critical edge that these works have when taken together. The work of Joseph Washington was particularly helpful in the fourth chapter because of his focus on the axis of religion as it pertains to Afro-Christianity. Further, the axis of religion gave us a means to reconnect decolonial thought with the spatially situated problem of Afro-Christian religion in the Delta Region. With Washington's articulation of the underdeveloped Christianity in Afro-Christianity, we were able to articulate a common axis from which to decolonize the theology of revelation and its epistemic division of the world into sacred and secular; spirit and flesh. While we left much of the Spirit/Flesh dynamics out of chapter four, since they were covered in Chapter one via the work of Sylvia Wynter, the chapter rejoins Wynter through her student Nelson Maldonado Torres. With Torres, we uncovered

again the binary logic of coloniality which found a religious host within the Afro-Christian churches within the Delta Region.

Afro-Christianity served as the host for coloniality, as Washington argued, although not with coloniality, because of its collective commitment to the colonial logics of race and morality. Nelson Maldonado Torres provided the representative decolonial perspective that allowed us to look further into Washington's claims because Torres too was also focused on the problem of Christian religion, especially Western Imperial Christendom. Specifically, Torres helped to unpack the ways in which the theology of revelation worked as a type of knowledge from which the globe could be divided into zones of true religion, false religion, and non-religion. Revelation was the theological means of grounding the way in which Western Imperial /Colonial Christendom enforced its epistemology of difference by representing humanity as ontologically religious ala Christian faith. In Torres' interpretation of Columbus' writings, we learned that Columbus deconstructed the pre-colonial outlook on humanity, as religious, and shifted it to an anthropological outlook when he named the indigenous peoples of the Americas as "non-religious." As such, the indigenous were non-humans based on their anthropological and cultural distinction from those religious humans of Europe.

Torres' point is to show that modernity is produced by an unprecedented shift in the European axis of assigning difference. The basis of assigning difference shifted from theological revelation and the confession of faith to the objective observation-- anthropological and biological difference--focused primarily on skin color. As we saw in Wynter's articulation of the Christian difference of Spirit/Flesh,

the anthropological signification of the indigenous as non-religious excluded them from both sides of the theological ontology of Spirit/Flesh. As such they were one step removed from the distinguishable humanity of those who had false religion and walked after the flesh. They were something totally other—persons that lacked both spirit and flesh. From this, we concluded that modernity has built into it an epistemic quality that allows it to affirm and disaffirm humanity through the use of anthropological and ontological claims. The roots of this epistemic quality remain in the theological imagination and its leveraging of revelation. These claims are buttressed by the power differentials, backed by the threat of violence that separates the modern world from the colonial world. Torres and Washington help us to locate blues people, by articulating the entanglements of the production and the subsequent adoption of the epistemology of Western Christendom by Afro-Christians.

As we argued above, the cultural hegemony expressed by Christian epistemologies of revelation rested in its ability to be the exclusive authority for assigning human differences. It is this activity that creates the alterity of the modern world that Quijano articulates as coloniality. In Chapter four, the theological roots of coloniality in which the blues people are entangled is exposed. Blues people experience these entanglements particularly within the prism of race. Their vision for life is arrested precisely because of the ways in which Western Christendom harnessed anthropological symbolism to categorize indigenous peoples of Africa and the Americas as “fleshless” and “spiritless” and, therefore, without the material capacities to reason out their humanity. Moreover, Western Colonial Christendom

racialized religious difference and reassigned it to the biological trait of dark skin color.

Racialization worked to signify darker skin as a representation of the alterity of European being. In one swoop of racial signification, histories, cultures, and knowledges were placed under the knowledge of Christian revelation and its rationalizing power. Blues people, as argued above, experience this not only at the hands of the descendants of colonists, racialized as white, but at the hands of those that share their same pigmentation. Within the Afro-Christian imagination and its adoption of revelation as the basis for dividing the world into anthropological and ontological distinctions, the colonial binary of the sacred and the profane persisted along with their racial signification. In hopes of finding relief from the suffering of enslavement, Afro-Christian churches made a tactical choice to merge the envisioned life-world of enslaved blacks with the religious imagination of modern Christianity. In this move, the binary understanding of the sacred and the profane was not placed under the scrutiny of the religious imagination which departed from the life-world imagined by the enslaved. As seen in Philip Linden's insights, black Americans, like their colonial predecessors were self-interested in equality so much so that they placed their skin color in the category of the sacred as a means of negotiating a seat at the table of modernity. This tactic of rescuing the symbol of black skin from its derogatory signification of non-religion proved to be untenable, yet and still, black church goers in the South would often chant, "Have you Got Good Religion? Certainly Lord!" But just who was their Lord? I submit that for many who sang these words it was the Lord of colonialism who distinguished light being from

dark being, religious being from non-religious being, rational being from irrational being, secular rationality from religious rationality, and finally revelation from knowledge. This Lord is the God of the colonial world that has implanted itself in such a way that the deep divinity present in the cultural production of the blues cannot be seen, and worse, is only seen as demonic, secular, or black. As we saw via Gutierrez's exegesis of Job, the revelation of God in the midst of suffering requires the courage to resist capitulation to the discursive construction of an imposed theological system. It is in this resistance that the victimized can proclaim their own innocence. As one blues singer articulates in this subversive act of claiming the innocence of the blues, blues people can "shake hands with the Devil and make him crawl in the sand." What has been submitted here clarifies that the power in blues epistemology is its ability to call into question the binary system that abuses the symbol of the devil to make restrictive ontological statements about the Delta environment, politics, personhood, sexuality, spirituality, and the sonic creativity of blues performance.

The blues allows us to enrich Gutierrez's interpretation of the revelation of God, found in the Book of Job. Through the eyes of blues people, Job is placed before a blues epistemic that is connected to the space of the Delta and the wound of coloniality that shapes it. From the blues perspective, the cultural mediatory axis of revelation shifts from the Judeo-Christian to the Delta blues spirituality. Such a shift disrupts and dislocates the epistemological landscapes of the Judeo-Christian, the Graeco-Roman and the Modern European, and helps us to see politics of revelation at play in the text. Between Job and his friends, we can see *difference* functioning at

the level of knowledge. In the light of the blues, the message of Job is to be suspicious of a theological system that makes no room for plurality in the mediation of truth. This message is made clear through the wisdom of blues people who have been forged in the fires of dislocation, racialization, racism, and epistemic apartheid. Such a statement does not mean that the knowledge concerning the insufficiency of retributive justice is disposable; rather it simply means that the revelation to which the text points can be mediated through different epistemic locations. Gutierrez's epistemic location was poverty, which is a locality that blues people share. They, too, are made poor by the dynamics of modernity and are outside the goods of retribution that go scarcely experienced by the subalterns of modernity.

The critique of retributive justice withstanding, the blues cosmivision has given us another perspective from which to read the story of Job. This blues reading is not the perspective of academic objectivity situated in redaction criticism, form criticism, and historical criticism, though these have their place. Rather, it is the lesson highlighted by Randall Bailey's work, "The Danger of Ignoring One's Own Cultural Bias When Interpreting the Text." This danger is a danger that is shaped by the pernicious epistemological violence of the modern world. Cultural bias, then, is a tool of dislocation that can help the interpreter consider another space from which to reflect. Is this not what those who heralded the merits of historical criticism in biblical interpretation have done from their European location? If this is true, then why is not the blues perspective a considerable perspective from which to take the text and its role as a mediation of God seriously? Blues people harnessed their

cultural position to affirm their epistemic location. Why else do the blues people moan affirmations when the blues priestess sings:

Don't ever let no one man worry yo' mind
Don't ever let no one man worry yo' mind
Just keep your four and five and mess up all the time

You can read you' hymnbook, read your Bible,
Read your history, and spell on down,
You can read my letters but you sho' can't read my mind.
When you think I'm crazy about you I'm leaving you all the time.

This subversive quality in the wisdom of Clara Smith's, 'Every Woman's Blues,' represents the courage that modernity genders and restricts to an imaged masculinity. Clara's self-articulation of her active self is resistant to the ontology of Afro-Christian faith and male domination (not to be confused with Euro-American Colonial Patriarchy). In her words, she locates herself and her relationships within the reality. She warns those males looking to make her an object of modern patriarchy that she has her "four and five" (a gun). To the Afro-Christian church she protests, "My mind will not be sacrificed to the binary constructions of the world that erase my epistemic difference—my blues difference." It is in this difference that she and the blues people from which she speaks can "leave all the time." While this dislocation does not lead to a blissful romantic life, it recognizes that something else, another way of life is possible.

As one who still holds on to the deep mystery of God, I hope that this work has done three things: that it has recovered the Delta Region as a space for theological reflection, that it has demanded the reader and the writer to engage in a practice of laying oneself bare before a world of the dominated (a practice that I first learned in the classes of Philip Linden, Jr.), and finally that this work has moaned.

For it is in the many moans of my ancestors that there remains a portal to Divinity that always requires further mediation. In this written moan there are many prayers and many visions, signs and wonders unknown that can never be said. Oh my God, may this moan be in harmony with the moans of my ancestors whose moans were cast in the deep wound that is the Mississippi Delta. For their blues moans, through some stroke of your Divine plurality, answered the moans of the ancients from a different land:

By the Rivers of Babylon -- there we sat down and there we wept
when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our
harps. For there our captors asked us for songs
and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying,
"Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"
How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?

-Psalms 137

Bibliography

- Althaus-Reid, Marcella. *Indecent Theology : Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Althaus-Reid, Marcella. *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology : Readings on Poverty, Sexual Identity and God*. London: SCM Press, 2004.
- Anderson, Victor. *Beyond Ontological Blackness : An Essay on African American Religious and Cultural Criticism*. New York: Continuum, 1995.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands : The New Mestiza = La Frontera*. 1st ed. San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987.
- Bailey, Randall C. "Is That Any Name for a Nice Hebrew Boy?' - Exodus 2:1-10: The De-Africanization of an Israelite Hero." In *The Recovery of Black Presence: An Interdisciplinary Exploration*, edited by Randall C. Bailey and Jacquelyn Grant, 25-36. Nashville: Abingdon, 1995.
- Bailey, Randall C. "The Danger of Ignoring One's Own Cultural Bias in Interpreting the Text." In *The Postcolonial Bible*, edited by R. S. Sugirtharajah, 66-90. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998.
- Bailey, Randall C., Tat-Siong Benny Liew, and Fernando F. Segovia. *They Were All Together in One Place? : Toward Minority Biblical Criticism*. Semeia Studies. Leiden: Brill, 2009.
- Baker, Houston A. *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature : A Vernacular Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.
- Baldwin, James and Randall Kenan. *The Cross of Redemption : Uncollected Writings*. 1st ed. New York: Pantheon Books, 2010.
- Bambara, Toni Cade. *The Black Woman; an Anthology*. New York: New American Library, 1970

- Bambara, Toni Cade. "On the Issue of Roles." In *The Black Woman: An Anthology*, edited by Toni Cade Bambara, 101-110. New York: Mentor 1970.
- Baraka, Amiri. *Blues People : Negro Music in White America*. New York: Perennial, 2002.
- Baraka, Imamu Amiri. *Blues People : Negro Music in White America*. 1st Quill ed. New York: William Morrow, 1999.
- Battin, Steven, "De-Civilizing Missions: Grassroots Struggle for Indigeneity as the Locus of Black Catholic Theological Epistemology." Presented at Philosophy Born of Struggle: Embodied Philosophy & Epistemologies of Liberation, University of Connecticut, November 2015.
- Beckford, George L. *Persistent Poverty; Underdevelopment in Plantation Economies of the Third World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972.
- Best, Lloyd and Kari Levitt. *Essays on the Theory of Plantation Economy : A Historical and Institutional Approach to Caribbean Economic Development*. Kingston, Jamaica: University of West Indies Press, 2009.
- Apricio, Juan Ricardo & Mario Blaser. "The "Lettered City" and the Insurrection of Subjugated Knowledges in Latin America." *Anthropological Quarterly* 82, no. 1 (2008): 59-94.
- Boodoo, Gerald. "Understanding Church and Theology in the Caribbean Today." In *Many Faces, One Church : Cultural Diversity and the American Catholic Experience*, edited by Peter C. Phan and Diana L. Hayes, 117-136. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005.
- Boodoo, Gerald. "Transgressive Theology or Transgressing Theology?" *Voices* XXXVI, no. 1 (2013), 15-24.
- Braudel, Fernand. *On History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- Campbell, Matthew and Michael Perraudin. *The Voice of the People : Writing the European Folk Revival, 1760-1914*. Anthem European Studies. London: Anthem Press, 2012.

- Carter, J. Kameron. *Race : A Theological Account*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Carter, J. Kameron. "An Unlikely Convergence: W. E. B. Du Bois, Karl Barth, and the Problem of the Imperial God-Man." *CR: The New Centennial Review* 11, no. 3 (Winter 2012): 167-224
- Césaire, Aimé, Clayton Eshleman, and Annette Smith. *Lyric and Dramatic Poetry, 1946-82*. Caraf Books. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for 'Indian' Pasts?" *Representations* 37 (1992): 1-26.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *Provincializing Europe : Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Charters, S.B. *The Legacy of the Blues: A Glimpse into the Art and the Lives of Twelve Great Bluesmen : An Informal Study*. Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1977.
- Classen, Constance. "Sweet Colors, Fragrant Songs: Sensory Models of the Andes and the Amazon." *American Ethnologist* 17, no. 4 (1990): 722-35.
- Cone, James H. *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation*. New York: Seabury Press, 1972.
- Cone, James H. *The Spirituals and the Blues : An Interpretation*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980.
- Cone, James H. *The Spirituals and the Blues : An Interpretation*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991.
- Cone, James H. *God of the Oppressed*. Rev. ed. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997.
- Cone, James H. *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2011.

- Copeland, M. Shawn. *Enfleshing Freedom : Body, Race, and Being*. Innovations. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010.
- Copeland, M. Shawn, LaReine-Marie Mosely, and Albert J. Raboteau. *Uncommon Faithfulness : The Black Catholic Experience*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2009.
- Cox, Karen L. *Dreaming of Dixie : How the South Was Created in American Popular Culture*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011.
- Crawley, Ashon. "That There Might Be Queer Sound " The Pew Center for Arts and Heritage. Last modified 2014. Accessed February 26, 2016. http://www.pcah.us/posts/219_that_there_might_be_queer_sound_by_ashon_crawley.
- Curran, Andrew S. *The Anatomy of Blackness : Science & Slavery in an Age of Enlightenment*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011.
- Davis, Angela. "Reflections on Black Woman's Roles in the Community of Slaves." In *A Turbulent Voyage : Readings in African American Studies*, edited by Floyd W. Hayes, 83-96. San Diego, Calif.: Collegiate Press, 2000.
- Davis, Angela Y. *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism : Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1998.
- Davis, David Brion. *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975.
- Deloria, Vine. *God Is Red : A Native View of Religion*. 3rd ed. Golden, Colo.: Fulcrum Pub., 2003.
- Douglas Brown, K. *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2015.
- Douglas, Kelly Brown. *Sexuality and the Black Church : A Womanist Perspective*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999.

- Douglas, Kelly Brown. *Black Bodies and the Black Church : A Blues Slant*. 1st ed. Black Religion/Womanist Thought/Social Justice. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America 1638-1870*. Harvard Historical Studies. New York: Longmans, Green, 1896.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870*. Harvard Historical Studies. New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1896.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. *Black Reconstruction in America : Toward a History of the Part of Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2012.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. and Nathan Irvin Huggins. *Writings..* New York, N.Y.:The Library of America, 1986.
- Duchrow, Ulrich, Franz J. Hinkelammert, and Catholic Institute for International Relations. *Property for People, Not for Profit : Alternatives to the Global Dictatorship of Capital*. London: Zed Books, 2004.
- Dussel, Enrique. "World System and 'Trans'-Modernity." *Nepantla: Views from South* 3, no. 2 (2002): 221-44.
- Dussel, Enrique. "Philosophy of Liberation, the Postmodern Debate, and Latin America Studies." In *Coloniality at Large : Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, edited by Mabel Moraña, Enrique D. Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui, 335-349. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.
- Dussel, Enrique D., Javier Krauel, and Virginia C. Tuma. "Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism." *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 465-78.
<https://muse.jhu.edu/journals/nepantla/v001/1.3dussel.html>.
- EnBerg-Pedersen, Troels. "Stoicism in the Apostle Paul: A Philosophical Reading." In *Stoicism : Traditions and Transformations*, edited by Steven K. Strange and Jack Zupko, 52-75. Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

- Engberg-Pedersen, Troels. *Paul in His Hellenistic Context*. Studies of the New Testament and Its World. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994.
- Ethridge, R. *From Chicaza to Chickasaw: The European Invasion and the Transformation of the Mississippian World, 1540-1715*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.
- Ethridge, R.F. and S.M. Shuck-Hall. *Mapping the Mississippian Shatter Zone: The Colonial Indian Slave Trade and Regional Instability in the American South*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009.
- Evans, David. *Big Road Blues : Tradition and Creativity in Folk Blues*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.
- Evans, David. "Bessie Smith's 'Back-Water Blues': The Story Behind the Song." *Popular Music* 26, no. 1 (2007): 97-116.
- Evans, David and Project Muse. *Ramblin' on My Mind New Perspectives on the Blues*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008.
<http://muse.jhu.edu/books/9780252091124/>.
- Eze, Emmanuel Chukwudi. "The Color of Reason: The Idea of Race in Kant's Anthropology." In *Postcolonial African Philosophy : A Critical Reader*, edited by Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, 103-139. Cambridge, Mass. ; Oxford: Blackwell, 1997.
- Eze, Emmanuel Chukwudi. *On Reason : Rationality in a World of Cultural Conflict and Racism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, 1965.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 1967.
- Fanon, Frantz. *A Dying Colonialism*. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1967.
- Fanon, Frantz. *A Dying Colonialism*. London: Writers and Readers, 1980.

- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 1991.
- Fields, Karen. "What One Cannot Remember Mistakenly " In *History and Memory in African-American Culture*, edited by Genevieve Fabre and Robert O' Meally, 150-163. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Finn, Julio. *The Bluesman : The Musical Heritage of Black Men and Women in the Americas*. 1st American ed. New York: Interlink Books, 1992.
- France. *Code Noir, Ou, Recueil D'édits, Déclarations Et Arrêts Concernant Les Esclaves Nègres De L'amérique Avec Un Recueil De Réglemens, Concernant La Police Des Isles Françaises De L'amérique & Les Engagés*. Paris: Les libraires associez, 1743.
- Frazier, Edward Franklin. *Black Bourgeoisie*. Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1957.
- Frazier, Edward Franklin. *Black Bourgeoisie*. New York: Collier Books, 1962.
- Frazier, Edward Franklin and C. Eric Lincoln. *The Negro Church in America*. New York: Schocken Books, 1974.
- Furstenberg, Francois. "Beyond Freedom and Slavery: Autonomy Virtue and Resistance in Early American Political Discourse." *Journal of American History* 89, no. 4 (2003): 1295-330.
- Garon, Paul. *The Devil's Son-in-Law: The Story of Peetie Wheatstraw and His Songs*. London: Studio Vista, 1971.
- Garon, Paul. *Blues & the Poetic Spirit*. London: Eddison Press, 1975.
- Garon, Paul. *Blues and the Poetic Spirit*. Rev. and expanded ed. San Francisco: City Lights, 1996.
- Garon, Paul. *The Devil's Son-in-Law : The Story of Peetie Wheatstraw & His Songs*. Rev. & expanded ed. Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Pub. Co., 2003.

- Genovese, Eugene D. and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese. *Fatal Self-Deception : Slaveholding Paternalism in the Old South*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Giggie, John Michael. *After Redemption : Jim Crow and the Transformation of African American Religion in the Delta, 1875-1915*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Gilroy, Paul. *Postcolonial Melancholia*. Wellek Library Lectures. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.
- Gobineau, Arthur. *Essai Sur L'inégalité Des Races Humaines*. 4 vols. Paris: Didot, 1853.
- Gobineau, Arthur and Robert Bernasconi. *The Moral and Intellectual Diversity of Races*. American Theories of Polygenesis. Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press, 2002.
- Gooding-Williams, Robert. *In the Shadow of Du Bois : Afro-Modern Political Thought in America*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009.
- Greer, Margaret Rich, Walter D. Mignolo, and Maureen Quilligan. *Rereading the Black Legend : The Discourses of Religious and Racial Difference in the Renaissance Empires*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.
- Grosfoguel, Ramón and Ana Margarita Cervantes-Rodríguez. *The Modern/Colonial/Capitalist World-System in the Twentieth Century : Global Processes, Antisystemic Movements, and the Geopolitics of Knowledge*. Contributions in Economics and Economic History. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002.
- Gutiérrez, Gustavo, Caridad Inda, and John Eagleson. *A Theology of Liberation : History, Politics, and Salvation*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988.
- Gutiérrez, Gustavo, Caridad Inda, and John Eagleson. *A Theology of Liberation : History, Politics, and Salvation*. Rev. ed. London: SCM, 2001.
- Gutiérrez, Gustavo and Matthew J. O'Connell. *On Job : God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987.

- Hahn, Steven. *The Roots of Southern Populism : Yeomen Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983.
- Hahn, Steven. *A Nation under Our Feet : Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Hahn, Steven. *Land and Labor, 1865*. Freedom, a Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008.
- Hahn, Steven. *The Political Worlds of Slavery and Freedom*. The Nathan I Huggins Lectures. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009.
- Harding, Vincent. *There Is a River : The Black Struggle for Freedom in America*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981.
- Harding, Vincent. *There Is a River : The Black Struggle for Freedom in America*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981.
- Harding, Vincent. *There Is a River : The Black Struggle for Freedom in America*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981.
- Harris, Marvin. *The Rise of Anthropological Theory : A History of Theories of Culture*. New York: Crowell, 1968.
- Harrison, Daphne Duval. *Black Pearls : Blues Queens of the 1920s*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1988.
- Headland, Thomas N., Kenneth Lee Pike, and Marvin Harris. *Emics and Etics : The Insider/Outsider Debate*. Frontiers of Anthropology. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1990.
- Hollenbach, Lisa. "Phonography, Race Records, and the Blues Poetry of Langston Hughes." In *A Companion to the Harlem Renaissance*, edited by C. Sherrard-Johnson, 301-316. Hoboken: Wiley, 2015.

- Hood, Robert E. *Must God Remain Greek? : Afro Cultures and God-Talk*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990.
- Hopkins, Dwight N., Anthony B. Pinn, and ebrary Inc. *Loving the Body Black Religious Studies and the Erotic*. 1st ed. Black religion, womanist thought, social justice. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- Hurston, Zora Neale. *Moses, Man of the Mountain*. 1st. ed. Philadelphia, New York etc: J. B. Lippincott, 1939.
- Ipsen, Avaren. *Sex Working and the Bible Bible world*. London: Equinox Pub.,, 2009.
- Jennings, Willie James. *The Christian Imagination : Theology and the Origins of Race*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.
- Jones, Claudia. "An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!" In *Let Nobody Turn Us Around : Voices of Resistance, Reform, and Renewal : An African American Anthology*, edited by Manning Marable and Leith Mullings, 316-24. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000.
- Jones, Sharon L. *Rereading the Harlem Renaissance : Race, Class, and Gender in the Fiction of Jessie Fauset, Zora Neale Hurston, and Dorothy West*. Contributions in Afro-American and African Studies. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2002.
- Jones, William R. *Is God a White Racist? A Preamble to Black Theology*. 1st ed. C Eric Lincoln Series on Black Religion. Garden City, N.Y.:. Anchor Press, 1973.
- Jones, William R. *Is God a White Racist? : A Preamble to Black Theology*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1998.
- Kant, Immanuel and James Creed Meredith. *The Critique of Judgement*. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952.
- Kaye, Anthony E. "The Second Slavery: Modernity in the Nineteenth-Century South and the Atlantic World." *The Journal of Southern History* 75, no. 3 (2009): 627-50. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/27779029>.

- Kebede, M. *Africa's Quest for a Philosophy of Decolonization*. New York: Rodopi, 2004.
- King, Stephen A. *I'm Feeling the Blues Right Now : Blues Tourism in the Mississippi Delta*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2011.
- Kipling, Rudyard and Thomas James Wise. *The White Man's Burden*. London: Printed for private circulation, 1899.
- Kubik, Gerhard. *Africa and the Blues*. Jackson Miss.: University Press of Mississippi, 1999.
- Kurtz, P. *In Defense of Secular Humanism*. Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1983.
- Labat, Jean Baptiste. *Nouveau Voyage Aux Isles De L'amerique. Contenant L'histoire Naturelle De Ces Pays, L'origine, Les Moeurs, La Religion & Le Gouvernement Des Habitans Anciens & Modernes: Les Guerres & Les Evenemens Singuliers Qui Y Sont Arrivez Pendant Le Long S*Jour Que L'auteur Y a Fait: Le Commerce Et Les Manufactures Qui Y Sont Établies, & Les Moyens De Les Augmenter*. 2 vols. La Haye: P. Husson etc., 1724.
- Lamas, Marta. *Feminism : Transmissions and Retransmissions*. 1st ed. Translated by John Pluecker. Theory in the World. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Liew, Tat-Siong Benny. *Politics of Parousia : Reading Mark Inter(Con)Textually*. Biblical Interpretation Series. Leiden: Brill, 1999.
- Liew, Tat-Siong Benny. *What Is Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics? : Reading the New Testament*. Intersections : Asian and Pacific American Transcultural Studies. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008.
- Linden, Marcel van der. *Western Marxism and the Soviet Union : A Survey of Critical Theories and Debates since 1917*. Historical Materialism Book Series. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- Linden, Phillip J. "Letting Go of Race: Reflections from a Historical Theological View." *Voices XXXVI*, no. 1 (2013). 75-88.

Lisa, Esteban. *La Teoría De La Cosmovisión Y La Teoría De La Relatividad En La Era Espacial; La Revelacion De La Armonía Cosmica Invisible En El Universo Y En El Hombre*. Buenos Aires: Instituto de Investigaciones de la Teoría de la Cosmovisión, 1972.

Livingstone, David. *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa; Including a Sketch of Sixteen Years' Residence in the Interior of Africa, and a Journey from the Cape of Good Hope to Loanda on the West Coast, Thence across the Continent, Down the River Zambesi, to the Eastern Ocean*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1858.

Lomax, Alan. *The Land Where the Blues Began*. 1st ed. New York: Pantheon Books, 1993.

Long, Charles H. *Significations : Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986.

Long, Charles H. *Significations : Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion*. Series in Philosophical and Cultural Studies in Religion. Aurora, Colo.: Davies Group, 1999.

Maldonado-Torres, Nelson. "Epistemology, Ethics, and the Time/Space of Decolonization: Persepctives from the Caribbean and the Latina/O Americas." In *Decolonizing Epistemologies : Latina/O Theology and Philosophy*, edited by Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Eduardo Mendieta, vol Transdisciplinary theological colloquia, 193-206. New York: Fordham University Press, 2012.

Maldonado Torres, Nelson. "Aar Centennial Roundtable: Religions, Conquest, and Race in the Foundations of the Modern/Colonial World " *American Academy of Religion* 82, no. 3 (2014): 636-65.

Marvin, Elizabeth West and Richard Hermann. *Concert Music, Rock, and Jazz since 1945 : Essays and Analytical Studies*. Eastman Studies in Music. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1995.

Massey, Douglas S., Robert J. Sampson, Phyllis C. Kaniss, and American Academy of Political and Social Science. *The Moynihan Report Revisited : Lessons and Reflections after Four Decades*. Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2009.

Massingale, Bryan N. *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2010.

McDonogh, Gary W., Robert Gregg, and Cindy H. Wong. *Encyclopedia of Contemporary American Culture*. London: Routledge, 2001.

Medina, Néstor. *Mestizaje : (Re) Mapping Race, Culture, and Faith in Latina/O Catholicism*. Studies in Latino/a Catholicism Series. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2009.

Mignolo, W.D. *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Chapel Hill: Duke University Press Books, 2011.

Mignolo, Walter. *Local Histories/Global Designs : Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000.

Mignolo, Walter. "The Darker Side of the Enlightenment: A De-Colonial Reading of Kant's Geography." In *Reading Kant's Geography*, edited by Stuart and Mendieta Elden, Eduardo, 319-344 . Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011.

Mignolo, Walter. *The Darker Side of Western Modernity : Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Latin America Otherwise: Languages, Empires, Nations. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011.

Mignolo, Walter D. "The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference." In *Coloniality at Large : Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, 225-258. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.

Mohawk, J. *Utopian Legacies: A History of Conquest and Oppression in the Western World*. Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 2000.

Moltmann, Jürgen. *Die Sprache Der Befreiung : Predigten U. Besinnungen / Jürgen Moltmann*. München: Kaiser, 1972.

Moody-Turner, Shirley. *Black Folklore and the Politics of Racial Representation Margaret Walker Alexander Series in African American Studies*. Jackson:

- University Press of Mississippi, 2013.
<http://muse.jhu.edu/books/9781617038853/>.
- Moses, W.J. *Black Messiahs and Uncle Toms: Social and Literary Manipulations of a Religious Myth*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993.
- Murray, Albert. *The Omni-Americans : New Perspectives on Black Experience and American Culture*. New York: Outerbridge & Dienstfrey, 1970.
- Murray, Albert. *Stomping the Blues*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976.
- Murray, Albert. *Stomping the Blues*. New York: Vintage Books, 1982.
- Noel, J.A. *Black Religion and the Imagination of Matter in the Atlantic World*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Noel, James A. *Black Religion and the Imagination of Matter in the Atlantic World*. 1st ed. Black Religion/Womanist Thought/Social Justice. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Nott, Josiah Clark, George R. Gliddon, L. F. Alfred Maury, Ferencz Aurelius Pulszky, and James Aitken Meigs. *Indigenous Races of the Earth*. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & co., 1857.
- Oliver, Paul. *Blues Fell This Morning : The Meaning of the Blues*. New York: Horizon Press, 1960.
- Oliver, Paul. *Blues Fell This Morning : Meaning in the Blues*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Petrella, Ivan. *Beyond Liberation Theology : A Polemic*. Reclaiming Liberation Theology. London: SCM Press, 2008.
- Phillip J. Linden, Jr. . "Reviewed Work: Desegragating the Altar: The Josephites and the Struggle for Black Priests, 1871-1960 by Stephen J. Ochs." *U.S. Catholic Historian* 11, no. 1 (1993): 138-40.

- Pike, Kenneth Lee. *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior*. 2 vols. Preliminary ed. Glendale, Calif. : Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1954.
- Pinn, Anthony B. *Varieties of African American Religious Experience*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998.
- Pinn, Anthony B. *The End of God-Talk : An African American Humanist Theology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Quijano, Anibal. "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America." In *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, edited by Mabel Moraña, Enrique D. Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui, 181-224. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.
- Quijano, Aníbal and Immanuel Wallerstein. "Americanity as a Concept, or the Americas in the Modern World-System." *International Social Science Journal* 44, no. 134 (1992): 549-557.
- Rabaka, Reiland. *Against Epistemic Apartheid : W.E.B. Du Bois and the Disciplinary Decadence of Sociology*. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2010.
- Rabaka, Reiland. *Hip Hop's Amnesia : From Blues and the Black Women's Club Movement to Rap and the Hip Hop Movement*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2012.
- Raboteau, Albert J. *Slave Religion : The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- Raboteau, Albert J. *A Fire in the Bones : Reflections on African-American Religious History*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995.
- Raboteau, Albert J. *Slave Religion : The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*. Updated ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Radhakrishnan, R. "Race and Double Consciousness." *Works and Days* 47/48 24, nos. 1 & 2 (2006). <http://www.worksanddays.net/W&D%202006.html>.

- Reed, Adolph L. *W.E.B. Du Bois and American Political Thought : Fabianism and the Color Line*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Reidy, Joseph P. *From Slavery to Agrarian Capitalism in the Cotton Plantation South : Central Georgia, 1800-1880*. The Fred W Morrison Series in Southern Studies. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992.
- Rescaniere, Alejandro Ortiz. "El Mito De La Escuela." In *Ideología Mesiánica Del Mundo Andino: Antología De Juan M. Ossio A*, edited by Juan M. Ossio A, 238-243. Lima: I. Prado Pastor, 1973.
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. 1st ed. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.
- Saikku, Mikko. *This Delta, This Land : An Environmental History of the Yazoo-Mississippi Floodplain*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005.
- Shanks, Andrew. *God and Modernity : A New and Better Way to Do Theology*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Smith, A. *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015.
- Smith, Theophus Harold. *Conjuring Culture : Biblical Formations of Black America*. Religion in America Series. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Southern Alluvial Land Association. *The Call of the Alluvial Empire : Containing Authentic Information About the Alluvial Region of the Lower Mississippi Valley, Particularly the States of Arkansas, Tennessee, Mississippi and Louisiana*. Memphis: Southern Alluvial Land Association, 1919.
- Spencer, Jon Michael. *Sacred Symphony : The Chanted Sermon of the Black Preacher*. Contributions in Afro-American and African Studies. New York: Greenwood Press, 1988.
- Spencer, Jon Michael. *Blues and Evil*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993.
- Spencer, Jon Michael. *Self-Made and Blues-Rich*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994.

- Spivak, Gayatri. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, 271-313. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *In Other Worlds : Essays in Cultural Politics*. New York: Methuen, 1987.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *Death of a Discipline*. The Wellek Library Lectures in Critical Theory. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty and Rosalind C. Morris. *Can the Subaltern Speak? : Reflections on the History of an Idea*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.
- Stolle, Roger and Lou Bopp. *Hidden History of Mississippi Blues*. Charleston, SC: History Press, 2011.
- Sunstein, Cass R. and Martha Craven Nussbaum. *Animal Rights : Current Debates and New Directions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Thomas, Greg. *The Sexual Demon of Colonial Power : Pan-African Embodiment and Erotic Schemes of Empire*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007.
- Tinker, George E. *Missionary Conquest : The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.
- Titon, Jeff Todd. *Early Downhome Blues : A Musical and Cultural Analysis*. 2nd ed. Cultural Studies of the United States. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994.
- Tomich, Dale and Michael Zeuske. "Introduction, the Second Slavery: Mass Slavery, World-Economy, and Comparative Microhistories." *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 31, no. 2 (2008): 91-100. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/40241709>.
- Townes, Emilie Maureen. *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*. Black Religion, Womanist Thought, Social Justice. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

- Vatican Council II. "Dei Verbum." In *Vatican Council II : The Basic Sixteen Documents : Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations : A Completely Revised Translation in Inclusive Language* edited by Austin Flannery, 97-116. Northport, N.Y.: Costello Pub. Co., 1996.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel Maurice. *Geopolitics and Geoculture : Essays on the Changing World-System*. Studies in Modern Capitalism = Etudes Sur Le Capitalisme Moderne. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Walsh, J.P.M. *The Mighty from Their Thrones: Power in Biblical Tradition*. Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004.
- Washington, Joseph R. *Black Religion : The Negro and Christianity in the United States*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984.
- Washington, Joseph R. "Are American Negro Churches Christian?" In *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, edited by James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, 92-100. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993.
- West, Cornel. "Black Theology and Marxist Thought." In *Black Theology : A Documentary History*, edited by James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, 409-424. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993.
- White, Deborah G. *Ar'n't I a Woman? : Female Slaves in the Plantation South*. 1st ed. New York: Norton, 1985.
- Williams, Delores S. *Sisters in the Wilderness : The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993.
- Williams, Delores S. *Sisters in the Wilderness : The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2013.
- Wittfogel, Karl August. *Oriental Despotism; a Comparative Study of Total Power*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957.
- Wood, Frances E. ""Take My Yoke Upon You": The Role of the Church in the Oppression of African American Women." In *A Troubling in My Soul : Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, edited by Emilie Maureen

- Townes and M. Shawn Copeland, Bishop Henry Mcneal Turner/Sojourner Truth Series, 48-59. Mayknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993.
- Woods, Clyde Adrian. *Development Arrested : The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta*. The Haymarket Series. London: Verso, 1998.
- Woodward, C. Vann. *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*. A History of the South,. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951.
- Woodward, David. "Reality, Symbolism, Time and Space in Medieval World Maps." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 75, no. 4 (1985): 510-21.
- Wright, Richard. "Blueprint for Negro Literature." In *The Black Aesthetic*, edited by Jr. Addison Gayle, 333-47. Garden City: Double Day, 1971.
- Wynter, Sylvia. "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/ Freedom: Towards the Human, after Man, Its Overrepresentation-- an Argument." *The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257-337.