

BOSTON COLLEGE

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AND MINISTRY

**BRINGING HUMAN DIGNITY INTO SLAVERY,
RACISM, AND BLACK LIVES MATTER**

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By: Levelt MICHAUD, S.J.

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Director: Daniel J. DALY, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Moral Theology, earned his Ph.D. in Theological Ethics at Boston College in 2008. Before joining the STM he was Associate Professor of Theology at Saint Anselm College in Manchester, NH. He served as the Theology department chair for five of his thirteen years at Saint Anselm.

Reader: Professor, James KEENAN, S.J., Ph.D.

**Vice Provost for Global Engagement, Canisius Professor;
Director of The Jesuit Institute**

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ABBREVIATION

BLM = Black Lives Matter

CSDC = Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church

CST = Catholic Social Teaching

POFP = Preferential Option for the Poor

SES = Socioeconomic Status

USA = United States of America

USCCB = United States Conference Catholic Bishops

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the transatlantic slave trade and racism in the United States, through the Catholic Social Teaching concepts of human dignity and the notion Preferential Option for the Poor. It argues that the Black Lives Matter movement is an organization that promotes these central principles of Catholic Social Teaching. On one hand, shame and discomfort are among the sentiments stirred by the critical recall of slavery and racism. On the other hand, the appeal to equality and hope are the responses spurred via asserting human dignity and Black Lives Matter. If slavery and racism prevent Black people from embracing their humanity, the concept of human dignity and the Black Lives Matter movement sustains them on under the undue and appalling sway of white supremacy.

More than four centuries have passed following the transatlantic slave trade, however, its ripple effects are fresh and much more alive in the 21st-century in the United States of America. They have simply changed shape and form, operating subtly. White privilege and supremacy seem to have withstood the test of time. Black people are still considered inferior, treated at times with much disregard and contempt around the world. The economic and the political relations in the world are shaped by along this faultiness. It has grown as a cultural element in American society. Unfortunately, notwithstanding numerous researches carried out in other fields, very few have deeply ventured into the dark past of slavery and racism and how they shape the world the American society. Slavery and racism have often been held as a perversion of the past. But the widening racial inequalities of present times is a reminder that these troubling realities cannot be vehemently ignored. The reason is simple: the victims are Black people. Racism is on the rise characterized by oppression and domination.

Some attempts have been made to foster the notion of human dignity and raise more awareness on the struggles of Black people, around the world specifically in The United States, to overcome the societal odds (wounds of slavery, and racism) which are relentlessly pushing them at the margins of the American society. There has been little talk about slavery and almost non-interest is shown to uproot racism. Black people have often been placed in the blame-victim-approach. It suffices to look at the curriculum of the university around the world and in the United States, where slavery was practiced in its most gruesome manner, to realize that we are far from appreciating the sorrow of a distinct category of people: The *NEGRO*. Everything is ruled by the question of race and very few are bold enough to admit that it is at the root of blatant discrimination and disparities. Unfortunately, the church has shared in this sin for quite a long time failing in its mission to be a voice for the marginalized and discriminated blacks. It's rather surprising that the Church has been less active in raising the issue and truly standing by the Black community.

In this work, I explore the complexity of the subject at hand formulated in the following way: Bringing Human Dignity into Slavery, Racism, and Black Lives Matter. It is developed as a whole in three chapters. The first chapter recounts the atrocity and the ongoing dehumanization processes of the transatlantic slave trade and racism in the USA. I argue that White atrocities were responsible for Black suffering and that the said situation is more deeply entrenched than before. Relying on the concept of human dignity rooted in the concept of Imago Dei, as well as the PFOP, the second chapter denounces slavery, racism and their consequences on Black people. I suggest that there need for a preferential option for Black people as the social disparities reveal that Black people are gradually sinking at the bottom of the United States is scale of preference. Finally, the third chapter probes into the Black Lives Matter movement. It is

a sign of hope and an unprejudiced way forward for not only for Black people in the United States, but for all the Black people around the world.

CHAPTER I

THE TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE AND RACISM IN THE UNITED STATES

This chapter addresses two major problems that hinder profoundly the life of Black people during several centuries: the transatlantic slave trade and racism. Each of those two issues is analyzed to show the burden they have caused on Black people. They are developed separately while being careful to allow the reader to see the close link which exists between them. Racism gave birth to the transatlantic slave trade, and this in its turn consolidated racism. In fact, the main reason that caused that Black people suffered the atrocity of the transatlantic slave trade was because the Europeans had considered Black people to be less human than the White people.

What is the transatlantic slave trade? What is racism? The response to those questions serves as guide to develop this chapter. To provide some elements of an answer to the question of what was the transatlantic slave trade, one must consider capture, journey, condition of voyages, brutality, bearing slave' identity, and the legacy of that trade. By describing the transatlantic slave trade, reasons are provided to condemn it in the second chapter relying on the Catholic Teaching which professes that every human is made of the image of God.

The weight of the transatlantic slave trade on the shoulder of Black people is explained in five main points before explicating what is racism. Firstly, the capture and the sale of Black people is illustrated. Actions which caused the separation forever of the slaves from their families, their cultures, their identities are explained. The journeys of their lives have turned into a new chapter. Secondly, details about the brutality and the horror in America are uncovered in the aim to explicate the enduring burden of the identity of slavery and the psychological harm the

trade has caused on Black people. Finally, the legacy of the transatlantic slave trades such as impoverishment, Africanization of slavery, and anti-blackness are described.

The Newness of that Trade

The transatlantic slave trade is termed by Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau as “the traffic of Black people (Le trafic d'hommes noirs)”¹ or what I designate *the traffic in human flesh* or what Johnson describes as “the monster in human form.”² My aim is not to present its history. It is rather to capture the unrelenting experience of the (fifteen to twenty million³) Africans who were captured and forcibly hauled to the Americas and the Caribbean from XV^e to XIX^e. Four hundred years of gruesome treatment against Black people. Four hundred years of enduring unutterable misery. The transatlantic slave trade was a human tragedy. How is it feasible that a group of human beings can wrong another group of another human being with such cruelty and inhumanity? Regarding the transatlantic slave trade, Patricia M. Muhammad asserts that “the

¹ *Le Code Noir* was written in France at the time of Colbert in 1685 under the reign of Louis XIV. Its purpose was to set up a latent practice to exploit human beings “legally,” justifying the unjustifiable, legitimizing the illegitimate amidst essence. *Le Code Noir* was the prime rule specifically regarding *la Traite Negrière*. Le code Noir was written in French at the time of Colbert in 1685 under the reign of Louis XIV. See, Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau, *Les Traites Négrières: Essai d'histoire Globale*, Bibliothèque des histoires (Paris: Gallimard, 2004).

² Walter Johnson and Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition, eds., *The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave Trades in the Americas* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 110.

³ See, Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison, Wis.: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1969): 25. It is stated that the scholar Kuczynski, concluded that fifteen million might be a “rather conservative figure.”

victims [...] were systematically dehumanized.”⁴ They have lawfully been made slaves. They were just assets according to the *Code Noir*. Captured in the African interior, transported to the coast, sold to slave traders, hauled in a slave ship, and sold and enslaved in the Americas. This represents the chain of burden hindering the life of Black people.

The Principle of that Trade

Notwithstanding that thousands of books and articles were written about the transatlantic slave trade, many of its features and irreparable consequences on Black people around the world seem to remain nevertheless unexplored. Curtin, historian on Africa and the Slave Trade, to explain how difficult it is to apprehend the transatlantic slave trade in its whole, states that: “Nobody knows or ever will know: either the necessary records are missing or they were never made.”⁵ In this sense, it remains an area of work particularly noteworthy. One cannot understand the condition of Black people nowadays without understanding where they come from and to what struggles they have been through. It would be impossible to understand their burden today without associating it to their source sorrow.

Even if it is difficult to grasp the logic of the transatlantic slave trade as a whole, one can take for granted and obvious the fact that at “the end of the 15th century, the Atlantic Ocean, which was a formidable barrier between the peoples living on the four continents that prevented regular contact between them, had shifted for the first time to a commercial corridor blending the

⁴ Patricia M. Muhammad, “The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A Legacy Establishing A Case For International Reparations,” *Columbia Journal of Race and Law* (March 3, 2013): 166.

⁵ Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 25.

histories of Africa, Europe, the American continent and the Caribbean.”⁶ This transaction between the three-continent had transformed the bottom of the Atlantic ocean into a gravesite for the millions of Black people who could not survive the dreadful crossing.

As in many societies, in Europe and African, there were slaves. However, the transatlantic slave trade brought some newness in the way that people were made slaves. The question, therefore, arises as to what is the transatlantic slave trade. Due to its complexity, it is very difficult to come craft a simple definition. We can draw some significant insight from the historian Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau. His arguments can help in shaping some ideas of what the transatlantic slave trade was. Olivier affirms there are many factors which must be considered when discussing the transatlantic slave trade. He reports that:

The transatlantic slave trade presupposes the occurrence of relatively organized and enduring supply of networks, capable of draining a significant number of captives: this requires a relative spatial network (capture or ‘production’ sites, etc.), logistics and a whole ideological framework to ensure the ‘legitimacy’ of the whole, in the eyes of the captives as well as in the eyes of the various captive sellers and buyers. 2- The existence of the slave trade can only be explained [...] by the inability of the slave populations to maintain themselves as a unified body. 3- The whole system rests on a third characteristic: the clear dissociation between the place of production and the place of use of the captives. 4- The fourth element is derived from the previous one. The society using the slave can sometimes ‘produce’ it directly. 5- The fifth and last element to characterize the slave trade derives from the previous ones. Such an important and organized traffic, operating essentially based on an exchange (tributary or merchant), cannot be carried out without the consent of political entities with a certain number of converging interests.”⁷

⁶ David Eltis, “*Transatlantic Slave Trade Database*.” <http://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/download>.

⁷ Pétré-Grenouilleau, *Les Traites Négrières*, 21–23. Original : *La traite suppose l’existence de réseaux d’approvisionnement en captifs relativement organisés et stables, capables d’en drainer un nombre significatif : cela nécessite un relatif maillage de l’espace (lieux de capture ou de « production »...), une logistique et tout un arsenal idéologique permettant d’assurer la « légitimité » de l’ensemble,*

The above arguments will serve in nurturing the question of race linked to racism. The question of race is very important to understand why Black people were the focal point of the transatlantic slave trade. I will develop the question of racism in another section. In keeping with the five characteristics of Olivier, one can adequately understand why when he points to fact that the “Transatlantic slave trade was an oceanic trade in African where men, women, and children”⁸ were reduced to subhuman conditions by Europeans.

The principle of the transatlantic slave trade was as follows: the ships departing from the major European ports loaded with various goods (weapons, wine, mirrors, junk) were to exchange the latter on the African coasts for Black people (men, women and children) reduced to slavery. These ships continued to the Americas where the slaves will be exchanged for spices, sugar, rum, cotton, coffee, and cocoa destined for Europe. It is this exchange among the three continents that is designated the transatlantic slave, trade known also as the ‘triangular trade.’ In other words, the transatlantic slave trade was a commercial system to recruit forced workers in one society—Sub-Saharan Africa—and transport them to another, Americas as slaves. The peculiarity of the transatlantic slave trade which makes it different to slavery in the ancient world

aux yeux des capteurs comme à ceux des différents vendeurs et acheteurs de captifs. 2- L'existence de la traite des Noirs ne peut s'expliquer, au contraire, que par incapacité des populations d'esclaves à se maintenir de manière naturelle. 3- L'ensemble du système repose sur un troisième caractère : la dissociation très nette entre lieu de production et lieu d'utilisation des captifs. 4- Le quatrième élément découle du précédent. La société utilisant l'esclave peut parfois le « produire » directement. 5- Le cinquième et dernier élément permettant de caractériser la traite dérive des précédents. Un trafic aussi important et aussi organisé, fonctionnant essentiellement sur le mode de l'échange (tributaire ou marchand), ne peut se faire sans l'assentiment d'entités politiques ayant un certain nombre d'intérêts convergents.

⁸ “Transatlantic Slave Trade | Slavery and Remembrance,” accessed October 6, 2020,

<http://slaveryandremembrance.org/articles/article/?id=A0002>.

is the fact that it relied on only Black people. As Katie Grimes in her article “Antiblackness”⁹ quite explicitly maintains that slavery was Africanized. Only Black people were reduced to slavery even if “both, Africans and Europeans participated in the trade, and both societies were deeply influenced by it.”¹⁰ However, the Western involvement had certain singularities that have left their imprint on the being of Black people during that trade.

According to Hugh Thomas, the transatlantic slave trade was one of the largest and most elaborate maritime and commercial ventures in all of history.¹¹ Historians and sociologists describe the transatlantic slave trade as the worst human exploitation ever known. Talking about that transatlantic slave trade, Malcolm X states: “nowhere has history recorded any more unnecessary bestial and ruthless human carnage.”¹²

Unrooted Body

In his article titled “La traite transatlantique des esclaves et l'esclavage, L'héritage psychique. [The Transatlantic Slave Trade and Slavery, The Psychic Legacy]”¹³, Rex Nettleford reframes the words of Jimmy Cliff, a star of reggae and a talented lyricist, in which he unveils the uprooting of the slaves in all senses of the word. The stanza is as follows:

⁹ Katie Grimes, “Antiblackness,” *Theological Studies* 81, no. 1 (March 2020): 169–180.

¹⁰ Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*.xv.

¹¹ See, Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1440-1870* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

¹² Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 65th print. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999), 117.

¹³ United Nations, “La traite transatlantique des esclaves et l'esclavage L'héritage psychique | Nations Unies,” *United Nations* (United Nations, n.d.), accessed October 16, 2020, <https://www.un.org/fr/chronicle/article/la-traite-transatlantique-des-esclaves-et-lesclavage-lheritage-psychique>.

You stole my story,
 Destroyed my culture,
 Cut out my tongue,
 So that I can't communicate.
 Then you negotiated
 And separate,
 Overshadowed my lifestyle.
 [Vous avez volé mon histoire,
 Détruit ma culture,
 Coupé ma langue,
 Pour que je ne puisse pas communiquer.
 Puis vous avez négocié
 Et séparé,
 Occulté mon mode de vi.]

Édouard Glissant apprehends very well the reality of the captured slaves by saying that:
 “The slave trade was a process of uprooting, of negation of the origin and culture of millions of men and women.”¹⁴ The terror of being captured, the beatings inflicted to make slaves want to be sold, the callous and humiliating examinations by prospective buyers and the last glimpses of family and friends marked a new departure in the life of the slaves. Slaves from different tribes were grouped according to their linguistic differences to prevent them from understanding each other or make themselves understood.

Human sciences and technologies have made great progress in re-establishing direct links between the descendants of slaves in America and their respective villages. But at the same time, nettle ford’s lyrics help us to understand how the trade had worked to ensure that there was no trace of Africa left in the slaves. How painful it must have been to live under the weight of the historical-existential void. How exhausted it is for one to live united in one's being when all one's

¹⁴ Édouard Glissant, *Mémoires Des Esclavages: La Fondation d'un Centre National Pour La Mémoire Des Esclavages et de Leurs Abolitions* (Paris: Gallimard : Documentation française, 2007), 12.

points of reference have fallen away, when the horizon and the past wade in a moment tormented by the suffering of knowing that one has been deprived of one's human freedom. Living the tragedy of being reduced from one day to the next to a wild animal is horrifying.

Many of the major routes used by the slave traders have been mapped, many details were given of the ships involved in the transatlantic slave trade, the names of some major captains are known, the main sellers and buyers are sometimes mentioned, some large cities in the Western countries bear the names of the slave traders, the statues of major oppressors have been raised. However, the major problem of where exactly such and such came from, what tribe did he/she come from, what family, what was the condition of his/her family, remains an equation with many unknown variables to determine. Probably it will never be resolved.

The daily need to reconstruct memory was the struggle of those who were victims of the transatlantic slave trade, and this struggle remains a wide-open wound in the consciousness of the Black people in America today. Even if the work done on the transatlantic slave trade does not allow Black people to reclaim their full African identity, it nevertheless helps to get an idea of what a slave endured on his journey. This is what I will portray in the following detail.

Slave Voyages

I intend to describe to some degree the suffering of the slaves during their journey on the sea. As the maxim goes, it is *only the one who's finger has been burned who has the right knowledge to talk about his full pain*. In this sense, I do not want to remain focus on historical details, either in the specific origins and destinations of slaves and the main routes used. I will address the slave voyages according to some data. The most prominent authors who give information about the conditions and the voyages of the slaves as Hugh Thomas in his book *The*

Slave Trade, David Eltis and David Richardson in their book *Routes to Slavery: Direction, Ethnicity, and Mortality in the Transatlantic Slave Trade, Studies in slave and post-slave societies and cultures*. For this section, I will rely on their research.

Since they have been captured and unrooted, the slaves depicted a figure of an itinerary, bodies on the move, bodies in displacement. Their journey started from the day they were captured. As they were captured in the interior of Africa, most of them were unaware of the existence of the sea until they found themselves in front of the ocean. In this vein, Thomas states that “the journey to the coast of a captive from his remote origin, in the interior of Africa [...] would have been much the same as if the slave was being carried to a Mediterranean port or an American one [...] It would have been as harsh. But it was the sea, the vast, mysterious, terrifying ‘green sea of darkness,’ which gave the Atlantic slave trade its special drama.”¹⁵ That sea became a vast tomb for those poor slaves.

If the capture itself is considered as the starting point of the dehumanization process of Black people, it was on the sea that the Black people made slaves were reduced to the state of Animals. Those same conditions will be their reality on the plantations in the Americas. It is important to mention that the time when they were waiting to be shipped was also harsh. Quoting Henry Wise, Thomas reports that:

‘In chained gangs, the unfortunate slaves are driven by the lash from the interior to the barracoons on the beach; there the sea-air, insufficient diet,’ ‘and dread of their approaching fate, produce the most fatal diseases: dysentery and fever [often] release them from their sufferings; the neighboring soil grows rich in the decaying remains of so many of their fellow-creatures, and the tracks are thick-strewn with their bones [...] On a short march,’ he continued, ‘of 600 slaves, a few weeks back, intended for the Emma Lincoln [of the United States], 125

¹⁵ Thomas, *The Slave Trade*, 1039.

expired on the road. The mortality on these rapid marches is seldom less than 20 per cent.¹⁶

In a different scene, he narrated that “All the young boys had ropes around their necks in a row, and all the men with chains in a long row, for about fifty persons in a row so that no one could escape without the other. At one time, the town took fire and about fifty slaves were consumed because the entry was crowded.”¹⁷ However, it was on the sea that the slave endured some of the unprecedented living conditions in their lives. Many experts on the transatlantic slave trade put a lot emphasis on the crossing by calling it “‘the middle passage’ as synonym to cruelty and inhumanity of the traffic.”¹⁸ A closer look at the conditions of the slave during the voyage speaks volumes.

It is said that the average duration of a crossing was about two months, but depending on the departure and arrival points, the duration could be very different. To grasp the whole reality in one image, Thomas affirms that “the crossing was just [...] ‘a pestilence which stalketh the waters.’”¹⁹ The irony of fate, the slave captains often assumed that they were doing the slaves a real human service by carrying them to slavery. Thomas reported that “Lord John Russell would tell [...] a third of the captives intended as slaves for the Atlantic crossing died during the land journey on their way to the coast.”²⁰ David Eltis and David Richardson affirm that: “Mortality

¹⁶ Ibid., 1370.

¹⁷ Ibid., 1372.

¹⁸ David Eltis and David Richardson, eds., *Routes to Slavery: Direction, Ethnicity, and Mortality in the Transatlantic Slave Trade*, Studies in slave and post-slave societies and cultures (London ; Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1997), 10.

¹⁹ Thomas, *The Slave Trade*, 1368.

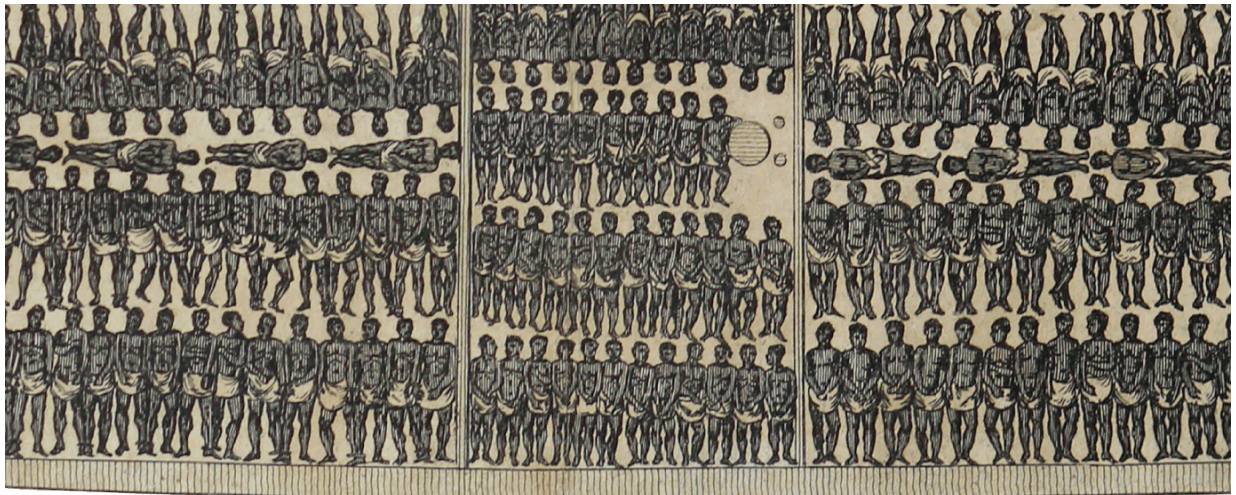
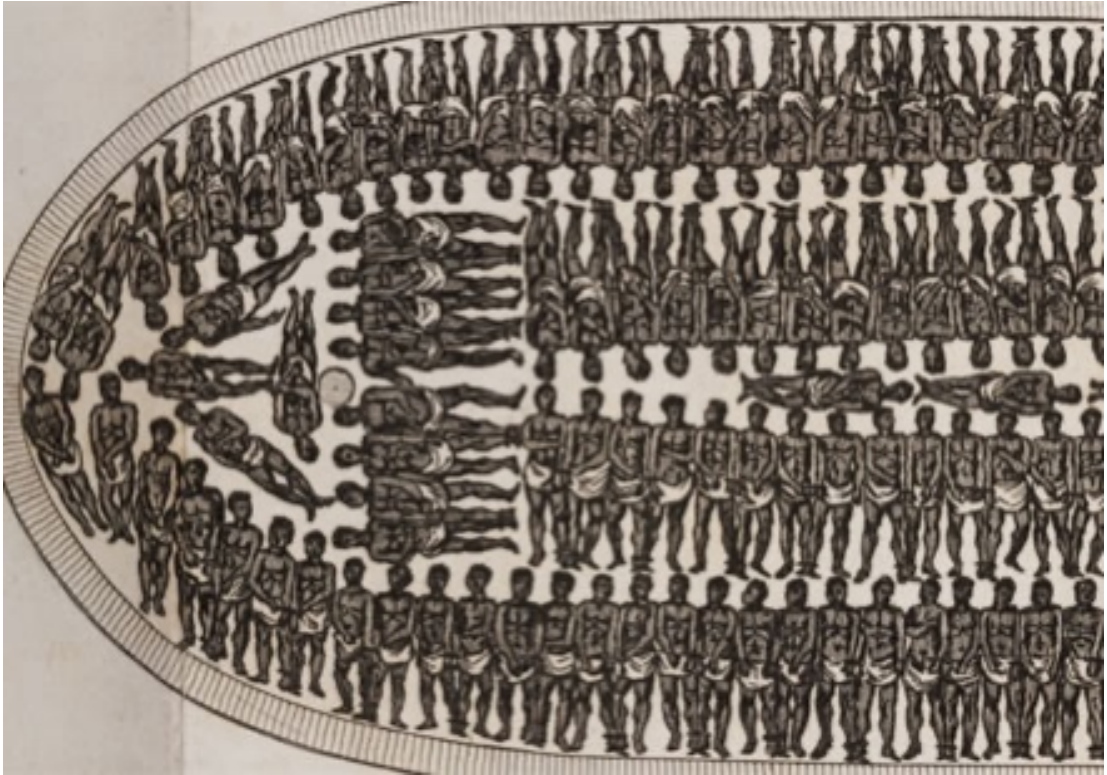
²⁰ Ibid., 1369.

rates on slave ships were highly unpredictable between one voyage and the next.”²¹ As is it the custom, all the “slaves were branded before their departure for the Americas: shaped iron letters cut into it ‘is put into the fire on the beach, and a small pot containing palm oil is always at hand; the iron is heated, and dipped into this palm oil, and dabbed on the hip [men] or [just above] the breast [women] or wherever the slave dealer may choose to have his slaves marked. The palm oil was to prevent the flesh from adhering to the iron.”²² Historians reported that ships of only twenty-one tons burden would have been expected to carry ninety-seven human beings across the Atlantic. On a boat, there could be as many as people, in general, more than three-quarters of the load could. The following images can give some idea.²³

²¹ Eltis and Richardson, *Routes to Slavery*, 17.

²² Thomas, *The Slave Trade*, 1373.

²³ Those images were taken on the following web page : <https://www.historytoday.com/history-matters/liverpool%E2%80%99s-slave-trade-legacy>



During the crossing, infants of all ages were separated from their mothers. The men, separated from the women, were chained in pairs and lined in rows, lying in spaces fifty centimeters wide. As Thomas stated, “men and women were always separated, the former in the hold, the latter in the cabin; the children as often as not were left on the top deck. Most slaves seem to have travelled naked.”²⁴ He goes on to emphasize that “Many children have been carried [...] because their size permitted the loading of a greater number.”²⁵ What were the living conditions aboard the ships?

Atlantic Sea Front Line and Witness of the Up

One can imagine that the already unbearable overcrowding of the ships was immediately transformed into nauseating promiscuity when seasickness and bad weather combined. The water rushed into the steerage, vomiting and excrement overflowed from the tubs and soiled everything, acting as a breeding ground for diseases. The lack of food, lack of hygiene, and confinement also contributed. Quoting Captain Marson, Thomas wrote: “many of the slaves had confluent smallpox: the sick had been thrown into the hole in one particular spot, and they appeared on looking down to be one living mass; you could hardly tell arms from legs, or one person from another [...] it was the most horrible and disgusting heap that could be conceived.”²⁶

During the day, the captives were taken up on deck to get some fresh air and relax. Always in chains, the men remained separated from the women and children. They went up in groups on the upper deck. The irons were checked and they were washed with seawater. Thomas describes the scene as follows:

²⁴ Thomas, *The Slave Trade*, 1376.

²⁵ Ibid., 1368.

²⁶ Ibid., 1377.

The distribution of the slaves in tens at the two daily mealtimes, the washing of hands in saltwater after eating, the punishment of slaves who refused to eat, the rinsing of mouths with vinegar, the weekly shaving (without soap), the obligatory cutting of fingernails to limit damage in fights, and the daily cleaning of the decks. Then there was the systematic stowing of the slaves at night, "those on the right side of the vessel facing forward and lying in each other's laps, while those on the left are similarly stowed with their faces towards the stern... Each negro lies on his right side, which is considered preferable for the action of the heart."²⁷

However, in case of bad weather or storms, the deportees were confined to the steerage area; there was no emptying, nobody washing, and no cleaning of the floors. The contents of the leases poured down the planks of the steerage, mixed with rotten things, with the emanations of those victims of seasickness, with vomiting gave an unpleasant odor.

The conditions of the voyages can be described as following: long-distance voyage; bad sanitary state, insufficient water, lack food, lack of hygiene, epidemics and the difficult co-habitation made the voyage a perfect image of the most unpleasant circles in Dante's inferno.²⁸ Not surprisingly, revolts sometimes occurred.

There were several revolts during the voyages to America. Some of them took place on the high seas. According to Thomas, there was at least one insurrection on every eight voyages. The slaves were aware of the consequences of their revolts. So, what could these consequences be and what was the reaction of the slave-traders to these revolts? Most of the time, the revolts were silenced. The rebels' leaders had to be made examples: they were publicly beaten and hanged or worse. Thomas says:

After a rising of slaves had been suppressed, forty-six men and a woman were hanged, shot, and thrown overboard; before they were killed, "they were [...] chained two together and, when they were hanged, a rope was put around their

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ See, Dante Alighieri, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Douglas Neff, *Inferno: From the Divine Comedy*, 2014.

necks and they were drawn up to the yardarm, clear of the sail. This did not kill them, but only choked or strangled them; they were then shot in the breast, and the bodies were thrown overboard. If only one of two who were ironed together was to be hung, a rope was put around his neck, and he was drawn up clear of the decks, beside of the bulwark, and his leg laid across the rail, and chopped off, to save the irons [...] The bleeding negro was then drawn up, shot in the breast and thrown overboard. The legs of about one dozen were chopped off in this way [...] All kinds of the sport were made of the business.²⁹

The captains often amputated part of the victim's body to frighten the other captives. Some captains used to force two captives to eat the heart of a third rebel before killing them. Indeed, many slaves believed that if they were killed without being dismembered they would return to their country after being thrown into the sea.

According to Thomas, the most brutal punishment was the following: "On the first day, he, the captive, had his hand cut off and displayed in front of all the slaves. On the second day, he had his second hand cut off and displayed in front of all the others. On the third day, his head was cut off and his torso was hoisted up to the great yard where he was exhibited for two days."³⁰ All those descriptions give some ideas about what the slaves left on the sea. After all this long journey of horror and bestiality, the slaves have gone through, the ships finally reached their destination: America. The slaves experienced the trade and the crossing as a heavy trauma, going so far as to erase the memory of Africa. Were the conditions of their lives different in America? I will address that question in the next section.

²⁹ Thomas, *The Slave Trade*, 1379–80.

³⁰ Ibid., 1390.

*Slavery's Brutality in America*³¹

As noted in the previous section, from the capture to the voyage, the slaves were treated as tongue-tied beasts. In Frantz Fanon's words, the slaves "were cut down like dogs."³² In this section, I want to present the horror and the brutality they had to experience when they reached the soil of the Americas. It is well known that the conditions of the life of a slave under the French masters were worse than any slaves' masters in the Americas. However, a slave was a slave everywhere and they underwent conditions which sought to kill every human aspect in them. Slavery, during the transatlantic slaves trade, was intrinsically linked to brutality. As usual, and as it was, referring to slaves, we immediately think of cruelty and atrocity. Slavery generates atrocities that are peculiar to the state of slavery. Some good movies like *Amistad*, *Roots*, *Twelve Years as a Slave, or Antebellum* can give an insight into what we mean by brutality when black people wear physical chains. In this section, I wish to uphold some description of the life which can be applied to everywhere slave was practiced in America.

The adjectives that describe the conditions of life, ordinary or extraordinary, of the slaves in the Americas could give one a cold foot. To name a few, I want to mention here: whipping, mutilation, hanging, beheading with axes, the torment of the wheel or the stake, deprived bodies of burial, heads and limbs exposed on the roads...etc. I can use the words of Ira Berlin: "Murders, beatings, mutilations, and humiliations- both petty and great- were an essential, not an

³¹ See, William Ray and Hester Blum, *Horrors of Slavery, or, the American Tars in Tripoli*, Subterranean lives (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2008).

³² Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 221.

incidental, part of chattel bondage.”³³ Also, Tristan Stubbs, paints a portrait immortalizing the brutality which the slaves endured. In his book, *Remembering Slavery*, he remarks: “[The overseer] might then rub salt into their [slaves’] lacerations and pour tar onto the wounds. Chastised, [...] was returned to work, despite the unbearable agony of his or her burning, flailed skin.”³⁴ *Les Amis des Noirs* described the wretched conditions of the slaves taking the case of Mainguy in Saint-Domingue. They reported that “Mainguy duly maintained and convinced that he had beaten his slaves with a stick, wounded them with scissors and a weapon vulgarly called a machete; ripped them with his teeth, and had them applied to different parts of their bodies, either red irons or burning coals.”³⁵

This list of adjectives gives an idea of the “brilliance of torments” inflicted on the slaves as if they had not endured enough during the capture and the crossing. Malcolm X made the same remark by saying: “I read descriptions of atrocities, saw those illustrations of black slave women tied up and flogged with whips; of black mothers watching their babies being dragged off, never to be seen by their mothers again; of dogs after slaves, and the fugitive slave catchers, evil white men with whips and clubs and chains and guns.”³⁶

³³ Ira Berlin; Marc Favreau; Steven F Miller, *Remembering Slavery: African Americans talk about their personal experiences of slavery and freedom*, New York: The New Press; Washington, D.C.: in association with The Library of Congress. 1998, p. XXII. □

³⁴ Tristan Stubbs, *Masters of violence: the plantation overseers of eighteenth-century Virginia, South Carolina, and Georgia*, Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press. [2018], p.2.

³⁵ Société des Amis des Noirs. *Réflexions Sur le code noir*. Paris, 1790. *The Making Of The Modern World*. Consulted on October 15, 2020. P. 11/ Document URL □

<http://find.gale.com.proxy.bc.edu/mome/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=MOME&userGroupName=mmln_m_bostcoll&tabID=T001&docId=U3609230606&type=multipage&contentSet=MOMEArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE>.

³⁶ Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 116.

In the Americas, generally speaking, slaveholders constantly resorted to the most severe punishment, ranging from simple misdemeanors to crimes. Since the slaves were divided according to their talent, (Negroes of the Land and Domestic Negroes), each of them received a different kind of punishment depending on the message the slave's masters want to convey to the others. Douglass, captured the terror experienced by the slaves in his book, called *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. He affirms that:

Mr Gore told him that he would give him three calls, and that, if he did not come out at the third call, he would shoot him. The first call was given. Demby made no response but stood his ground. The second and third calls were given with the same result. Mr Gore then, without consultation or deliberation with anyone, not even giving Demby an additional call, raised his musket to his face, taking deadly aim at his standing victim, and in an instant poor Demby was no more. His mangled body sank out of sight, and blood and brains marked the water where he had stood....A thrill of horror flashed through every soul upon the plantation, excepting Mr Gore. He alone seemed cool and collected. He was asked by Colonel Lloyd and my old master, why he resorted to this extraordinary expedient. His reply was, (as well as I can remember,) that Demby had become unmanageable. He was setting a dangerous example to the other slaves, —one which, if suffered to pass without some such demonstration on his part, would finally lead to the total subversion of all rule and order upon the plantation. He argued that if one slave refused to be corrected, and escaped with his life, the other slaves would soon copy the example; the result of which would be, the freedom of the slaves, and the enslavement of the whites.³⁷

Since they are chattel, all slaves whose work is part of a simple technical division of labour – “Negroes of the land” assigned to agricultural work, sailors rowing in rhythm with the transport canoes - see their work punctuated by blows (lashes of the commander's whip or the rope of the boat's ‘boss’). Depending on the season, they worked twenty- four hours a day. Thus, they were, in effect, assimilated to the beast of burden. Talking about his own experience, lived

³⁷ Frederick Douglass et al., *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 37–38.

in his flesh, Solomon Northup said, "I had been driven through the streets like a dumb beast... I had been chained and beaten without mercy..."³⁸ Douglass recounts: "Mr Thomas Lanman, of St. Michael's, killed two slaves, one of whom he killed with a hatchet, by knocking his brains out. He used to boast of the commission of the awful and bloody deed. I have heard him do so laughingly. The wife of Mr Giles Hicks, living but a short distance from where I used to live, murdered my wife's cousin, a young girl between fifteen and sixteen years of age, mangling her person in the most horrible manner, breaking her nose and breastbone with a stick, so that the poor girl expired in a few hours afterwards."³⁹ The wearing of irons that can cause intense suffering and, in the long run, serious handicaps, being put at the helm in the 'hospital' of the dwelling or being locked up in the dungeon, a sort of tumultuous vault whose vaulted ceiling is almost level with the ground.

The violence which was applied to all categories of slaves, including the most "privileged" (workers, commanders, servants, etc.), most often took the form of the three or four-stakes whip (torture inflicted by the whip inflicted on the slave tied to stakes on the ground). For having lived and witnessed those kinds of horror, Douglass tended to paint a scene in those words:

Before he commenced whipping Aunt Hester, he took her into the kitchen, and stripped her from neck to waist, leaving her neck, shoulders, and back, entirely naked. He then told her to cross her hands, calling her at the same time a d——d b——h. After crossing her hands, he tied them with a strong rope, and led her to a stool under a large hook in the joist, put in for the purpose. He made her get up on the stool and tied her hands to the hook. She now stood fair for his infernal purpose. Her arms were stretched up at their full length so that she stood upon the ends of her toes. He then said to her, "Now, you d——d b—— h, I'll learn you how

³⁸ Solomon Northup, *twelve years a Slave, Narrative of Solomon Northup a Citizen of New- York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841*, p. 53.

³⁹ Douglass et al., *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, 38.

to disobey my orders and after rolling up his sleeves, he commenced to lay on the heavy cowskin, and soon the warm, red blood (amid heart-rending shrieks from her, and horrid oaths from him) came dripping to the floor. I was so terrified and horror-stricken at the sight, that I hid in a closet, and dared not venture out till long after the bloody transaction was over.⁴⁰

The passage from the state of a domestic servant, worker, commander or refiner to that of “Negro of the land” constitutes, in the eyes of the master who frequently threatens him as well as in the eyes of the slave, a terrible punishment: such a mutation does not only imply a deterioration in the material conditions of life, it also refers to an unbearable animalization. It is said also, Sunday violence took on the most atrocious forms in certain dwellings: slaves whipped, crucified, whipped and then fed to the crabs.

I could have related many other scenes; the inventory would have been infinitely horrifying. For the slaves, as Douglass pointed out:

A single word from the white men was enough—against all our wishes, prayers, and entreaties—to sunder forever the dearest friends, dearest kindred, and strongest ties known to human beings. I suffered more anxiety than most of my fellow-slaves. I had known what it was to be kindly treated; they had known nothing of the kind. They had seen little or nothing of the world. They were in very deed men and women of sorrow and acquainted with grief. Their backs had been made familiar with the bloody lash so that they had become callous; mine was yet tender.⁴¹

This quote from Douglass gives some inside on how the condition of life of the slave shape the way they endured the identity of slaves.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 25.

⁴¹ Ibid., 57.

Enduring the Indignity of Slavery

In the previous section, slavery in the way that it was practiced was addressed by showing that Black people have a right to be aggrieved. Corporal punishment was the principal method used by the slave's holders to keep them in total submission by destroying their self-consideration. Slavery was a system through which White Europeans exploited Black people. As a system, it was set up in keeping with some rules. We have to bear in mind *The Black Code (Le code Noir)*. I choose to focus on *Le Code Noir* because it was the first formal compilations of rules defining what was a slave was during and after the transatlantic slave trade.

According to this code, a slave was a simple “movable” whose owner can use at his whim. The slaves were treated in the same light as the brute beasts. David Turley summarizes the identity of the slave by saying that “they were moveable commodities.”⁴² They were subjected to mechanisms of acculturation and deculturation: their birth names stripped and replaced by those of their slave masters or Saints, and their beliefs by Christianity. Quoting Orlando Patterson, Katie Grimes states that:

slavery represents 'the permanent, violent domination of natally alienated and generally dishonored persons.' The slave's relative powerlessness stems from a unique source: "it was always originated (or was conceived of as having originated) as a substitute for death, usually violent death... slaves were not allowed freely to integrate the experience of their ancestors into their lives, to inform their understanding of social reality with the inherited meanings of their natural forebears, or to anchor the living present in any conscious community of memory."⁴³

All those events had seriously influenced the image Black people to have of themselves, and the images that were made of them, and the continued impact on the life of Blacks today.

⁴² David Turley, *Slavery*, New perspectives on the past (Oxford, UK ; Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 1.

⁴³ Grimes, “Antiblackness,” 173.

The world of the Black people was the perfect image of the world imagined by Aldous Huxley where he illustrates how the psychologically wounded and the social environment when intertwined creates dystopian society.⁴⁴ Vincent Miller states that “Chattel slavery as it was practiced [in the United States] for centuries was not just an economic system but an organizing principle of American life, and as such, has proven hard to shake even a century and a half after Emancipation.”⁴⁵ Quoting the historian George Frederickson, “Johnson states that ‘slavery is ... the skeleton in the American closet.’”⁴⁶ One can observe that slavery has simply changed form. The USCCB says: “After slavery ended, many former slaves faced continued servitude in the evolving economies that once relied upon their labor, and blacks encountered new forms of resentment and violence. In freedom, millions of blacks lived in constant fear for their lives. Most resided in extreme poverty and endured daily insults in their interactions with whites.”⁴⁷ Black people do not bear physical chain, but the shadow of the slavery is like a chameleon who seems to adapt efficiently with the colors and forms it takes and thereby remaining very difficult sufficiently appraise its impact on the life of Black people. However, without wanting to be exhaustive, I want to cite, some, among many, legacy of slavery in the United States in the following lines.

⁴⁴ See, Aldous Huxley, *Brave the new world*, Harper Collins Publishers, New York, 2004.

⁴⁵ Vincent Miller, "Slave Play"; "American Factory", *America Magazine*, October 2019, p.48.

⁴⁶ Johnson and Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition, *The Chattel Principle*, 111.

⁴⁷ <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/racism/upload/open-wide-our-hearts.pdf>, consulted on October 15, 2020, p.16.

The Legacy of Slavery: The World's Most Monstrous Crime

Malcolm X says: "how shocked I was when I began reading about slavery's total horror. It made such an impact upon me ... The world's most monstrous crime..."⁴⁸ Knowing the history of the transatlantic slave trade and slavery help to understand better the reality of Black people in America. One cannot know the historical trajectory of Black people in America without being touched or being ashamed. Black people live with a constant historical open wound and some White people do not want to be reminded that "their family fortune was built upon this trade."⁴⁹

After having been uprooted by their capture and dehumanized by the subhuman treatment they underwent, the slaves found themselves, without a guide, without knowledge or consciousness in America, having for all their bodies and their psychic damage. Malcolm X relates:

It may, perhaps, be fairly questioned, whether any other portion of the population of the earth could have endured the privations, sufferings and horrors of slavery, without having become more degraded in the scale of humanity than the slaves of African descent. Nothing has been left undone to cripple their intellects, darken their minds, debase their moral nature, obliterate all traces of their relationship to mankind; and yet how wonderfully they have sustained the mighty load of most frightful bondage, under which they have been groaning for centuries.⁵⁰

Their psychological conditioning generated that self-contempt reinforced by segregationist laws, in a society strongly marked by class differentiation and very much governed by the violation of Black people, who even after abolition, were not considered as citizens.

⁴⁸ Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 116.

⁴⁹ Johnson and Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition, *The Chattel Principle*, 111.

⁵⁰ Douglass et al., *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, 11.

After the abolition, the former slaves tried to project themselves unceasingly towards an uncertain future where their wounds, their tremors, their fears and their disappointments left them in a constant state of desolation despite the desire to vanquish and to not bend under the inhuman weight of the slaves.

It is well explained by experts, in the film titled *13th*, that the collapse of slavery gave birth to a new system, convict leasing. And once convict leasing faded away, a new system was born, a Jim Crow System, that relegated African American to permanent second-class status. And now decades after the collapse of the old Jim Crow and a new system has been born again in America. A system of incarceration that, once again, strips millions of poor people, overwhelmingly poor Black people, of the very rights supposedly won in the civil rights movements.

One can easily understand that there was never been a period in the history of Black people in America where the law and order branch of the state has not operated against their freedoms, their liberties generally speaking. Rooted in the transatlantic slave trade and observing the daily reality of Black people in America informs that the question of race deserves special attention to the frame with regards to the whole picture. In the next section the question of race will be discussed. I feel called to heed to the words of the famous singer of the reggae, Bob Marley as an invitation to look for a better condition of life for Black people in America. Ironically, the title of the song is *war*, meanwhile, the full message concerns peace.

Until the philosophy which holds
one race superior and another inferior
is finally and permanently
discredited and abandoned...
Until there no longer
first-class and second-class citizens of any nation,
Until the color of a man's skin...

Is of no more significance than the color of his eyes...
 Until the basic human rights...
 are equally guaranteed to all Without regard to race...
 Until that day
 The dream of lasting peace,
 World citizenship Rule of international morality
 Will remain in but a fleeting illusion to be pursued,
 But never attained...
 Until the ignoble and unhappy regimes
 That hold our brothers ...
 Sub-human bondage Have been toppled ...
 Utterly destroyed...⁵¹

I have sought to illustrate, the transatlantic slave trade and the slavery in the Americas as a heavy burden on the shoulders of Black people and constitutes stumbling block in the American society and that is not ready to go away too soon. Among of the legacy, the question of race deserves a special attention. It is impossible to conceive the American society without heavily weighting on the question of race. Every component of the American society is colored by race. Let's go back to our second major problem namely racism with which Black people deal daily in United States.

Racism in the United States

In this section, the focus will be put on racism in the United States of America. Racism is one of the plagues hindering the livelihood of Black people. However, Black people are not the sole group that has fallen prey to racism in United States, but they certainly carry the greatest burden of racism unlike any other group. The intention is not to minimize the experiences of

⁵¹ "War Bob Marley Lyrics - Google Search," accessed October 17, 2020, <https://www.google.com/search?q=war+bob+marley+lyrics&oq=war+of+Bob&aqs=chrome.4.69i57j0l7.12798j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>.

other groups with regard to racism. This fact is strongly highlighted by Karen Teel when asserts that “Racism is often discussed in terms of White-Black relations”⁵² in the context of United States or as Cone says “The focus on blackness does not mean that only blacks suffer as victims in a racist society, but that blackness is an ontological symbol and visible reality which best describes what oppression means in America.”⁵³

The suffering of Black people, caused by racism, is intrinsically linked to the story of slavery in the United States. It is important to underline that “slavery existed in the United States in one of its most brutal modern forms”⁵⁴ and above all, Black people are the only group who were enslaved in the United States. In fact, there is something unique in the way that Black people have been seen and continue to be seen and victimized. Katie Grimes asserts that “Because slavery had been Africanized, all black people, even those who were free, were in many ways treated like slaves while all White people, even those who did not own slaves, were empowered to act like masters.”⁵⁵ This uniqueness of the history of the Black people in the United States is foundational to understand the prevailing racism.

The struggle of Black people in United States, as W.E. Dubois wrote, is the one of “two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose

⁵² Karen Teel, *Racism and the Image of God*, 1st ed., Black religion/womanist thought/social justice (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 5.

⁵³ James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, [1st ed.], C. Eric Lincoln series in Black religion (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970), 27.

⁵⁴ Cyprian Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* (New York: Crossroad, 2004), 35.

⁵⁵ Grimes, “Antiblackness,” 176.

dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder”⁵⁶ and worst, stepped on by racism and their hope is “to be both a Negro and an American, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face.”⁵⁷ Since it is question of racism, it could be felt with a lot of emotions. In the same vein Brian Massingale remarks: “no other issue engages [us] so emotionally and viscerally as that of racism.”⁵⁸

To grasp the question of racism, I will develop it in two sections. The first section will focus on the so-called scientists, who developed theories over five centuries (late 15th to early 21st) to sustain the idea of race and justify the exploitation of others who were considered as inferior by putting Black people at the bottom of the race ladder. I will rely on Robert W. Sussman in his book entitled *The Myth of Race: The Troubling Persistence of an Unscientific Idea* published in 2014. Through the historical trajectory of racist ideas, it will be demonstrated that racism is not simply a mere event rather than a “system”⁵⁹ which has roots deeply embedded in an enduring and influential academic perspective. By so doing, a historical and sociological point of view will be underscored, as to how racism pushed those theorists to devise theories rooted on “races.” To do so, I will turn to Robin DiAngelo as well, in her book named *White Fragility: Why It’s So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism* published in 2018.

The second section portray how racism, as a dehumanizing and demonic system, has trampled on the deepest being of Black people, on their dignity, leaving wounds which have

⁵⁶ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Millwood, N.Y: Kraus-Thomson Organization Ltd, 1973), 3.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 4.

⁵⁸ Bryan N. Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2010), p.xii.

⁵⁹ Robin J. DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It’s so Hard for White People to Talk about Racism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), 21.

been handed down from generation to generation. Racism will be presented on its cultural and structural aspects in the context of the United States. My analysis will be made through the lenses of critical race theory as it is presented by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic in their book entitled *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, published in 2012.

The Pioneering Figures on Racial Theories Development Across the Centuries

The history of Black people in United States and around the world, is portrayed by struggles, humiliation and suffering. These calamities are not linked to the finitude of the human condition. They are consequences of racism. In the movie *13th* it is mentioned that, for Black people in United States “one struggle ends just to go straight to the next and the next.”⁶⁰ One can affirm that there is a constant willingness of White people to dehumanize the Black people. Black people are not victims of racism by chance. Being in United States, it is impossible for a Black person to fail to acknowledge the suffering of the Black communities. This consciousness most of the time is shaped both by knowing the history of Black people set their feet on the shores America as slaves from Africa, about five centuries ago and also by personal experiences— (it would be impossible to find a Black person in United States who has not experienced racism at least once in his or her lifetime). These experiences help to comprehend that since the *Negros*⁶¹ arrived in this country, they have been humiliated, brutalized and ripped

⁶⁰ Ava DuVernay, *13th*, Motion Picture, USA, 2016.

⁶¹ Here, the concept "Negro" is used deliberately while rejecting its pejorative meaning strongly used by White to mark the difference between White and Black with the intention of leading Negroes to belittle what they are deep down inside. Negro in its original sense appeals to the bravery of blacks who were not afraid to fight, even at the cost of themselves, for their dignity. Such was the case of a famous Haitian voodoo priest in the late eighteenth century known as “Nègre Marron.” The concept “Negro” was forged in the hull of the slave ship, where the divine in the black man was almost assaulted by the slave

apart despite the pressures and unimaginable psychological wounds they bore crossing the Atlantic in dehumanizing conditions. Where does, racism and the views of considering Black people as inferior, come from? An appropriate answer to the former question invites one to probe before everything else on the concept of “race.”

The Myth of Race and its Shaping of the World

Talking about racism requires that one takes very close look at the question of race. In this regard, David Theo Goldberg underlines that “racisms of any kind must conceptually presuppose reference, however veiled or implicit, to race.”⁶² Why it is so important to mention the question of “races”, if everyone already knows that there is only one race, the ‘Human Race? Many are the anthropologist and biologists whom affirm that biologically there is only one race. Sussman declares that “humans are more biologically and genetically similar than the simple racist classifications that have been advanced.”⁶³ However, no one can ignore that the world is shaped by the ideas of “Race” above all the society of United States.

In United States the question of “race” is existential. Economic and political decisions have been influenced for centuries by questions of “race.” In this sense, Massingale remarks that “Race is far from being an insignificant reality in American life. It remains [our] deepest national obsession; it is still a principal and all too often decisive lens through which we filter [our]

settlers. The concept is in itself a sign of resistance... In this article, it is used to claim negritude as a particular characteristic of the color of the black skin that symbolizes vigor. It is used here as an assumption.

⁶² David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Oxford [England] ; Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell, 1993), 94.

⁶³ Robert W. Sussman, *The Myth of Race: The Troubling Persistence of an Unscientific Idea* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014), 2.

perception and understanding of the world. We continue to live in a highly racialized society, that is, ‘a society wherein race matters profoundly for differences in life experiences, life opportunities, and social relationships.’”⁶⁴ The said position is reaffirmed by DiAngelo who maintains that “While there is no biological race as we understand it, race as a social construct has profound significance and shapes every aspect of our [United States] lives...Race will influence whether we will survive our birth, where we are most likely to live, which schools we will attend, who our friends and partners will be, what careers we will have, how much money we will earn, how healthy we will be, and even how long we can expect to live.”⁶⁵ Hence, there is an urgent need to talk about racism.

The boldness to reflect on racism can help to subsequently grasp what it is. Once it is understood, one could probably understand how and why the so-called scientists have come to sustain the idea that different races prevail. However, one may be tempted to ask: Why did some White individuals start to theorize about races? DiAngelo by paraphrasing Ta-Nehisi Coates seems to have a substantial answer to that question. He says: “Race is a child of racism, not the father.”⁶⁶ Then what about racism?

Where Racism Comes From?

The multitude of reactions emanating from the death of George Floyd across the world, especially in United States, gave the impression that racism is a recent phenomenon. Far from that, it is not a new fact in the history of humanity. However, the racism which puts Black people in the bottom of the ladder and at the same level as animals was nurtured in Europe. Racism is a

⁶⁴ Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, 8.

⁶⁵ DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 8.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 16.

European child and it is not by hazard that it has been developed at the same time of the transatlantic slave trade.

Following the arrival of Europeans in America, the question of “races” has gained grounds in the academic circles in Europe. Two main theories had emerged, namely: “The Polygenecists (or pre-Adamite theory) and the Monogenecists (or degenerated).”⁶⁷ The Polygenecists advanced the ideas that non-Western Europeans were not created by God but were on earth before Adam. According to that theory, the ‘physical characteristics and complex behaviors’ of non-Western Europeans were biologically fixed and unchanging. The Monogenecists were of the view that all humans were created by God but the non-White were degenerated from the original ideal man, since they lived in less ideal environmental conditions (i.e., bad climate and/or uncivilized social conditions). These two theories became the bedrock of racist thinking for over five centuries. It is true that the pre-Adamite theory didn't last long, but the Monogenecists has left its mark on the world for five centuries.

Five Centuries of Racial Thought Fostered by Europeans and Americans

The Monogenecists

The introduction of the webpage ‘Race, the Power of an Illusion,’ posits: “Race is a modern idea. Ancient societies, like the Greeks, did not divide people according to physical distinctions, but according to religion, status, gender, class, even language. The English language didn’t even have the word ‘race’ until 1508, in a poem by William Dunbar referring to a line of kings.”⁶⁸ Later the idea of race was consolidating in the aim “to legitimize racial inequality and

⁶⁷ Sussman, *The Myth of Race*, 25–63.

⁶⁸ https://www.pbs.org/race/000_About/002_04-background-01-x.htm, visited on September 1, 2020.

protect White advantage.”⁶⁹ As it was mentioned above, the idea of race was going to occupy a central place for the Monogenecists.

One of the earliest and strong advocates of the degenerated theory was the philosopher John Locke (1632-1704). Locke “accepted the biblical account of human origins but believed that the equality at creation and the endowment of natural rights to all humans no longer had to be applied because the American Indians were not using their land properly.”⁷⁰ Thus, the indigenous could be mistreated since they were not equal to the Europeans. Another important figure who deserves to be mentioned is the French politician and philosopher Montesquieu (1689-1755). Montesquieu is considered the first theorist to develop the biologist theory of race in his famous book *De l'Esprit des Lois* (1748). He believed that climate and geography affect the temperaments and customs of people from one country to another. According to him, variations in climate made it possible to understand the differences between men and their cultures.

The racist implications of the degenerate theory began to resurface during the Enlightenment among eugenic theorists. Between the 19th and early 20th centuries, eugenic thought was slightly transformed and developed into a powerful “scientific” argument in defense of racist ideologies. Among the imminent thinkers who championed this current of thought, we have David Hume (1739-1740), especially in his *Treatise on Human Nature*. Hume is regarded as one of the most influential figures in the history of Western philosophy and of the Enlightenment. Sussman indicates that Hume wrote: ‘I am apt to suspect the negroes and in general all the other species of men (...) to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a

⁶⁹ DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 17.

⁷⁰ Sussman, *The Myth of Race*, 14.

civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual.”⁷¹ Hume consistently insisted on a natural inferiority of Black people which set them apart from other races. From the European point of view civilization had never existed outside of Europe.

We also have the influential German philosopher, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). Kant essentially created a racist anthropology based on skin color. He is known as one of the most influential philosophers of the Enlightenment. Sussman affirms that Kant “is also considered the father of modern concepts of scientific racism.”⁷² Sussman further emphasize that “In Kant’s theory, the nature of the white race guarantees its rational and moral order, and they are in the highest position of all creatures, followed by yellow, black, and then red. Non-whites do not have the capacity to realize reason and rational moral perfectibility through education.”⁷³ Kant states: “*Les Nègres d’Afrique n’ont reçu de la nature aucun sentiment qui s’élève au-dessus de la niaiserie.*”⁷⁴ (“African Negroes have not received from nature any feeling that rises above silliness..”) As with his contemporaries, Kant's theories were based on travelers' accounts and his own opinions. Just like today, there are many “experts” on the African continent who claim to know Africa better than Africans themselves. Sadly, they are often taken seriously.

Another European biological determinist who greatly contributed to theorizing on the question of race was the Frenchman Joseph-Arthur de Gobineau (1816-1882). In his famous book, *Essai sur l'Inégalité des Races Humaines*⁷⁵, published in four volumes (1853- 1855), he brought out the idea that whites were not only superior in general, but also that one category

⁷¹ Ibid., 26–27.

⁷² Ibid., 27.

⁷³ Ibid., 28.

⁷⁴ Immanuel Kant, Roger Kempf, and Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, *Observations sur le sentiment du beau et du sublime* (Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 2008), 150.

⁷⁵ See, Joseph-Arthur de Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races*. (New York: HFertig, 1967).

among whites was superior to other whites: the Aryans. Gobineau believed that the white race, especially the Aryans, could only remain in control if they could eliminate [...], the Blacks because they [Blacks] are morally and intellectually inferior and can lead to the degeneration of the purity of the white race if the two races come to mix. This gives an idea of the origin of the cliché of savagery that is attached to Black people.

Gobineau had a major influence on early 20th century politics in both Europe and America. Sussman explains that Gobineau had a great impact on thinkers such as “William Z. Ripley and Ernst Haeckel, who in turn had a direct influence on Madison Grant— in his famous book *Passing of the Great Race*— and U.S. immigration policies.”⁷⁶ The thought of Gobineau and his colleagues has strongly influenced American thinkers who gave birth to the Eugenics movement in the United States.

The Eugenics

The eugenic movement in United States sought to prove how the climate affects people biologically and how the barbaric conditions of Black people is irreversible. This movement of scientific racism reached its peak in the United States in the mid-1920s. One of the main figures of the eugenics movement was Nathaniel Southgate Shaler (1841-1906). He was professor of paleontology and geography and later dean of Harvard. Shaler asserts that “Each time a black man obtained his liberation in America, his fate leads to conditions even worse than the slavery that was imposed on him ... the negro is made to be dominated.”⁷⁷ By that time “Eugenics

⁷⁶ Sussman, *The Myth of Race*, 38.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 46.

courses became popular in high schools and colleges throughout the United States. Americans families entered ‘fitter family’ contests and attended popular lectures by leading eugenicists.”⁷⁸

The common key point of the all the authors mentioned is the following one: “dark skin is linked to moral and mental infertility.”⁷⁹ For having been taught by the so-called scientists and their enduring theories conveyed, on a large scale, for centuries, “Consumers of these racist ideas have been led to believe there is something wrong with Black people.”⁸⁰ Hence, it is clear that the fundamental feature in the construction of the ideas of “races” is not only to claim objective legitimacy for the idea of different human races, but even more to exploit it in a fundamentally inegalitarian sense. It end up by the construction of “the racial ladder with White on the top rung and Black on the bottom.”⁸¹ A paradigm has been created: “The paradigmatic manifestation is the white supremacist myth structure that asserts natural, biological differences between Blacks and whites- the familiar identification of whites with the qualities of intelligence, industriousness, and piousness, and the corresponding association of blacks with the qualities of dullness, laziness, and lustfulness.”⁸² We have seen the direct linear relationship of racist ideology through the centuries permeated the historical pattern of racial prejudice, discrimination and hatred against Black people. In other words, the racism has hindered the life of Black people at the global. We now turn to the question of racism.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 303.

⁷⁹ Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 203.

⁸⁰ Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York: Nation Books, 2016), 29.

⁸¹ Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, p.xi.

⁸² Kimberlé Crenshaw, ed., *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement* (New York: New Press : Distributed by W.W. Norton & Co, 1995), 129.

Racism

In the previous section, I demonstrated the intensity and the perversity of some racist thinkers, all White, who have influenced the academic world for the past five centuries. The close relationship between them and the evil patterns of racism laid down has hindered the live of Black people around the world. The deep-seated construct of their perverse reasoning has led Black people to be perceived as inherently inferior.

This basis allows me “to approach the question of racism as a social construction whose mechanisms must be understood through an examination of discourse and practices.”⁸³ Since racism is a human creation, understanding it, is already part of its deconstruction. Hence, this section will be devoted in a particular way on how the thoughts of these authors mentioned above have shaped the culture and the institutions nowadays. Racism will be looked at through the sociological lens to figure out how this affect Blacks in a society where being White is the standard norm?

That racist literature calls our attention upon one thing. One can remark that racism is capable of appearing in the most remote regions, where there is no single Black person. This urges us to ask, what then is racism? It seems there is a lot which remains unknown about racism despite a diversity of studies carried out on the topic. However, it is very important to point out that the only thing one cannot take for granted when it comes to talk about racism, is the emotional and physical burden and suffering it bestows on the life of Black people.

Based on the trajectory of the racists thinkers, one can affirm that racism has a long history which contributed to consolidate a process during which, people, consciously or

⁸³ (Marie-Anne Matard-Bonucci, « L’histoire devant le racisme et l’antisémitisme », *Histoire@Politique*, n° 31, janvier- avril 2017,p.7) [en ligne, www.histoire-politique.fr]

unconsciously, have come to internalize the racial ideologies that associate White people/whiteness with superiority and Black people/blackness with inferiority. In other words, “Whites were created to have power and dominion, and Blacks were created to be subservient.”⁸⁴ This perception seemed not to have changed a lot. Blacks are considered and continue to be considered as inferior, stupid, idiots, unable to think for/by themselves without being dictated by White how they must live. On the other hand, Whites have taken and continue to take themselves as the norm considering themselves superior, intelligent, created to dictate the way Black people should live.

Using the binary Black/ White, it would sound as if it refers to two different races. Since It has already been mentioned earlier that “races” is not a biological reality but rather an ideological one. Therefore, what binary reality of White and Black are we referring to in the context of this paper? To that question, it seems that the distinction made by Massingale grasps the reality in a complete sense and presents it in a bright and novel perspective which better apprehends the sense of the binary Black/ White reality. Massingale states:

White refers to the dominant cultural group...Originally, this group was primarily of Western European descent...’White, then, does not refer to a ‘race,’ but rather to a social group that has access to political, social, economic, or cultural advantages that people of color (Black) do not have... and by ‘Black’ [it refers] much more to a social groups that, for the most part, find themselves without easy access to the political, social, economic, or cultural advantages enjoyed by those designate as White.⁸⁵

The death of Eric Garner (2014), Freddy Gray (2015), George Floyd (2020) are wakeup call to look at racism closer in United States. As already stated, those deaths cannot be

⁸⁴ Michael P. Jaycox, “Black Lives Matter and Catholic Whiteness: A Tale of Two Performances,” *Horizons* 44, no. 2 (December 2017): 325.

⁸⁵ Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, 2.

considered as the starting point to tackle the issue of racism. It would be like wanting to cure a cancer by applying medicine on the external wounds. However, these cases, exposed to the eyes of everyone, (thanks to technology otherwise it would remain invisible and denied for a long time as it has always been for centuries), have raised awareness and in-depth interest in the content of racism which have dehumanized Black people.

If one had to wait for the death of George Floyd to be unveiled before the eyes of the world in an unprecedented way, despite the huge battle lead by Dr. Martin Luther King Junior, then we come to the realization that racism can turn out to be very elusive. DiAngelo maintains that “Racism has been among the most complex social dilemmas since the founding of this country.”⁸⁶ The reasons are multiples. Massingale affirms:

Discussions about race in the United States often are marked by unease, tension, anxiety, fear, anger, and confusion. For some, facing the reality of racism surfaces many fears, such as a fear of not being heard or understood; a fear of being blamed; a fear of the personal changes that might be required for a more faithful discipleship. Some feel defensive when the talk turns to racism; they do not want to be made responsible for wrongs that they lack a direct role in causing. Others feel embarrassed or ashamed as they confront a terrible history of human degradation and suffering perpetrated by members of their race. Anger is another common response in racial discussions, especially on the part of those who have been most directly harmed by this insidious social evil.⁸⁷

All this contributes in making racism, a constitutive part of the society. It therefore becomes difficult and almost impossible to track down to such an extent that the most racist could wonder why they may be accused of being racist. It is like the rapist who sustains the idea his rape came as a result sexual attraction from a teenage girl. In this line of thought the question therefore arise: how then can racism be defined?

⁸⁶ DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 43.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p xiii.

Cultural Racism

According to Merriam Webster dictionary, the word Racism does not appear in print prior to the early 20th century. This remark indicates how it has been taken as normal to a group of people to treat another group of people as inferior without drawing attention to themselves. Many are the definitions that can be considered for this paper. Goldberg states that “racism is most generally defined as the irrational (or prejudicial) belief in or practice of differentiating population groups on the basis of their typical phenomenal characteristics, and the hierarchical ordering of the racial groups so distinguished as superior or inferior.”⁸⁸ The USCCB, on their side, in the document “*open wide our hearts*” says: “Racism arises when—either consciously or unconsciously—a person holds that his or her own race or ethnicity is superior, and therefore judges persons of other races or ethnicities as inferior and unworthy of equal regard.” DiAngelo goes further by saying that : “When a racial group’s collective prejudice is backed by the power of legal authority and institutional control, it is transformed into racism, a far-reaching system that functions independently from the intentions or self-images of individual actors.”⁸⁹ Ibram X. Kendi define it in the following way : “Racism is a marriage of racist policies and racist ideas that produces and normalizes racial inequities.”⁹⁰ “Racism is a powerful collection of racist policies that lead to racial inequity and are substantiated by racist ideas.”⁹¹

To understand racism, we must first distinguish it from mere prejudice and discrimination. Prejudice and discrimination are parts of racism. Let’s rely on DiAngelo account in order to draw the differences that appear therein. “A prejudice is a prior judgment about

⁸⁸ Goldberg, *Racist Culture*, 93.

⁸⁹ DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 20.

⁹⁰ Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist*, First Edition. (New York: One World, 2019), 35.

⁹¹ Ibid., 33.

another person based on the social groups to which he or she belong... Prejudice consists of thoughts and feelings, including stereotypes, attitudes and generalizations that are based on little or no experience and are then projected onto each person in that group... Prejudices tend to be shared because people are swimming in the same cultural water and absorbing the same messages.”⁹² Crenshaw relates that, “ the problem of prejudice is that it obscures the work of reason by clouding perception.”⁹³ DiAngelo goes further to say that “Discrimination is an action based on prejudice. These actions include ignorance, exclusion, threats, defamation and violence.”⁹⁴ Prejudice always manifests itself in action because the way a person sees the world determines his or her actions in the world. Then on can understand that prejudice and discrimination are part of racism, they are just piece of a much larger, more complex system of oppression which is racism.

Based on those definitions, a racist is the one who thinks he or she is superior to anyone else who is different from him or her, while thinking that the Black person is at the bottom of the ladder. Only a member of a powerful and dominating group can be racist. It’s rare to find someone who identifies himself or herself as racist, but racism is so present that it can be found in almost all the daily interactions involving Whites and Blacks. Sussman said: “Racism is a part of our everyday lives. Where you live, where you go to school, your job, your profession, who you interact with, how people interact with you, your treatment in the healthcare and justice systems are all affected by your race.”⁹⁵ Racism is a real problem which deserve to be resolved. Racism has already claimed the lives of so many Black people. The example of the United States

⁹² DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 19–20.

⁹³ Crenshaw, *Critical Race Theory*, 129.

⁹⁴ DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 19–20.

⁹⁵ Sussman, *The Myth of Race*, 2.

speaks volumes. The dignity of Black people is not respected. A reality quite openly portrayed in police brutality and mass incarceration of Blacks in USA prisons reveal what systemic racism can do, when one race regards the other as inferior and wantonly dangerous without any justified basis. How many innocent black men have found themselves behind a prison cell simply because of the color of their skins?

Criminality

As I argued in the previous sections, the ultimate pioneers of the eugenics movement in the United States sought to illustrate scientifically that black skin is a manifestation of threat and that White people must avoid—in all the sense of that word—Black people. Unfortunately, this racist mentality has strongly shaped the American culture and the myth that Black people are intrinsically dangerous. As Daniel J. Daly points out when he remarks that such kind misunderstanding which shape culture could be call simply “structure of vice.”⁹⁶

Before a large number of White people every bodily movement of a Black person becomes a protest. In order words, every desire and aspirations of a Black person, in the American context, however, intimate may be viewed by most White people as a plot or a conspiracy. Each glance of a Black person is surveyed as a threat for the former. The existence of Black people is, *per se*, a crime to be avoided. In fact, Black people are regarded as the

⁹⁶ Daniel J. Daly, “Structures of Virtue and Vice,” *New Blackfriars* 92, no. 1039 (May 2011): 355. For Daniel J. Junior the Structures of vice are the social structures that in some way consistently function to prevent the human good, the common good, and human happiness, and, the socially rooted moral habits willingly internalized by moral agents that consistently prescribe sinful human acts, and produce human unhappiness.

personification of danger and foes of the genuine functioning of the ‘society.’⁹⁷ It is in this sense that state measures have been taken to make lawful the brutality of the police to prevent the danger that Black people embody for White people. For instance “qualified immunity”⁹⁸ tend to be the pretext that shields the police from any abuse. It is not surprising that the killing of Black men in American at the hands of White police has become too common that it no longer moves anyone. The White police are in most cases portrayed as the good guys trying to do their job and the black as the offenders. In fact, most Black people are guilty before proved innocent.

One can concede that the use of the term “African-American”⁹⁹ in the context of the United States’ society symbolizes that they are not acknowledged as a full member of that community. If that were not the case they would have been simply referred to as Americans and nothing else. In American society, a Black person has been always perceived, most often and in the non-familiar circle, as an anti-citizen. This reveals why a significant number of Black people are the “scape-goats” of the justice system in the United States. A large proportion of Black innocent people dwell in American prisons and many Black families have turned fatherless, while single-motherhood has been on the rise. This has even given rise to expressions such as

⁹⁷. By great society I mean a homogenous White society in a White country. As faultlessly paraphrased by President Trump’s the motto “let us make America great again.” This could suggest in order words “let us make America White again” even if America had never been a homogenous country. However, the culture of White people appears to be the defining patterns of society.

⁹⁸ See, Lael Weinberger, “Making Mistakes about the Law: Police Mistakes of Law between Qualified Immunity and Lenity,” *The University of Chicago Law Review* 84, no. 3 (2017): 1561–1601.

⁹⁹ See, Brian G. Gilmore and Reginald Dwayne Betts, “Deconstructing Carmona: The U.S. War on Drugs and Black Men as Non-Citizens,” *Valparaiso University Law Review* 47, no. 3 (2013 2012): 777–818.

“driving while black,”¹⁰⁰ “walking while black,”¹⁰¹ “Cashing check while black,”¹⁰² “Jogging while Black”¹⁰³ or “racial profiling.”¹⁰⁴ This led Lebron to assert that: “Completely unfounded charges of crimes were offered up to turn the gears of racial brutality within communities and institutions. Once these gears began moving, almost no person or institution could or would prevent the ensuing barbarity.”¹⁰⁵ Besides, Lebron points to the fact that “a main piece of propaganda used to justify black lynching [was] supposed criminality, the charge of rape of white women being especially common. The notion of black criminality was essential for white supremacists.”¹⁰⁶ Lebron’s study refers to the past but it can be apply to the present time.

The above instances sufficiently portray why Black people are most likely to be stopped by the police force for no reason at all. It is said that a Black person is more likely to be stopped than a White person by White police officers and found guilty of an offence. This fact has its roots deeply entrenched in the legacies of slavery considered in the introductory chapter.

¹⁰⁰ See, Patricia Warren et al., “Driving While Black: Bias Processes and Racial Disparity in Police Stops” (New York, USA: New York University Press, 2020).

¹⁰¹ See, Tyler Regan Wood, “Walking While Black: An Examination of the Police-Pedestrian Interaction” (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2008), accessed November 5, 2020, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/304531169?pq-origsite=summon>. And Mark Montgomery and Irene Powell, “Walking While Black (WWB)” (Vanderbilt University Press, 2018).

¹⁰² See, Emily Flitter, “For Black Americans, Simply Cashing a Check Can Be Tough,” *Chicago Tribune (1963)* (Chicago, Ill: Tribune Publishing Company, LLC, 2020).

¹⁰³ See, “Ahmaud Arbery Was Guilty of Nothing but Jogging While Black,” *The Washington Post (Online)* (Washington, D.C: WP Company LLC d/b/a The Washington Post, 2020).

¹⁰⁴ See, Guy Padula, *Colorblind Racial Profiling: A History, 1974 to the Present* (Milton: Taylor and Francis, Taylor & Francis Group, Routledge, 2018).

¹⁰⁵ Christopher J. Lebron, *The Making of Black Lives Matter: A Brief History of an Idea* (New York, NY, United States of America: Oxford University Press, 2017), 30.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

A study¹⁰⁷ shows that one out of three young Black men born in the last decades will experience prison at least once in their lives. For young White men, the rate is only one out of seventeen. The incarceration rate for Black men is six times higher than that of White men. It is easy to see why, as studies on the fear of assault show, Americans are more afraid of being victimized by unknown Black people than White people. To this regard, anthropologist and sociologist Wacquant states:

The equation of anonymous African-American males with peril on the street is moreover not limited to the white neighbourhoods and dwellers of the dualising metropolis. By the 1980s, a 'siege mentality' had diffused into black districts that inclined its residents to be 'suspicious of unfamiliar black males they encounter[ed]' in public places (Anderson 1990, p. 5). The result is that everywhere the dominant strategy for ensuring physical safety in urban space is to avoid younger African Americans. In the dualising metropolis, the appraisive slogan 'black is beautiful' has been effectively supplanted by the vituperative adage 'black is dangerous'.¹⁰⁸

Loïc Wacquant explains that:

Among the manifold effects of the wedding of ghetto and prison into an extended carceral mesh, perhaps the most consequential is the practical verification and official solidification of the centuries-old association of blackness with criminality and devious violence. The condemnation of Negrophobia in the public sphere has not extinguished the fear and contempt commonly felt by whites towards a group they continue to regard with suspicion and whose lower-class members they virtually identify with social disorder, sexual dissolution, school deterioration, welfare profiteering, neighbourhood decline, economic regression, and most significantly violent crime ...¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ See, Cesar Cuauhtemoc Garcia Hernandez, *Migrating to Prison: America's Obsession with Locking up Immigrants* (New Press, 2019).

¹⁰⁸ Loïc Wacquant, "Race as Civic Felony*," *International Social Science Journal* 57, no. 183 (2005): 128.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

Moreover, Wacquant goes on to say that: “Along with the return of Lombroso-style mythologies about criminal atavism and the wide diffusion of bestial metaphors in the journalistic and political fields (where mentions of ‘pre-social superpredators,’ ‘wolf-packs,’ ‘animals’ and the like are commonplace), the massive over-incarceration of blacks has supplied a powerful common-sense warrant for ‘using colour as a proxy for dangerousness.’¹¹⁰ All this explains and justifies police brutality against the Black male. On one hand Just as slavery ensured the “social death” of the uprooted Black people and their descendants on the American soil by wrenching them from all recognized social relations. On the other hand, criminality bequeathed on the Black people justified their imprisonment, excluding them from the social covenant and depriving them of their rights and dignity as human beings and looked upon as second class American citizens.

It is therefore not surprising to comprehend the behavior of White police officers and their aggressive handling of Black people. It has become commonplace to blame, arrest and mistreat Blacks as criminals. A label that seems to fit them so well when in confrontation with the police. A large portion of them almost always appear to be on the wrong side of the law during a police confrontation. It is not racist to be against crime and to be tough on criminals. But the question arises as to how we are to justify the fact that a considerable portion of those who are always described and arrested are mostly black even for things other races will not be. Are we to contend that the Black people are the greatest threat in America after 400 years of subjugation and oppression? We, therefore, turn to police brutality against Black people in the United States.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

Police Brutality

Lebron states that “Slavery was an explicit practice of the ownership of black human bodies and the control of black lives under a political regime that openly legitimated such ownership and control”¹¹¹ which practiced into huge brutality. After centuries, the practice of brutality remains an approach widely used by White police officers to confront Black people. Since the beginning of slavery until more recently and despite a lot of talk about racism, Black people in the United States have always been treated in the most disgracing manner. Whenever they have failed to provide sufficient evidence, through their appearance, conduct or credentials, their dignity even as law-abiding citizens have often been infringed.

The fact that Black people, because of their skin’s color, are associated with criminality, shape the way White police officers attend to Black people. In other words, blackness is equivalent to criminality and by so doing the White police officers have the right to treat Black people according to their whims and desires. It is not surprising to observe that a large percentage of the White police abusive behavior on Black people almost always goes unpunished. The police in most cases are always justified to do what it pleases with few or no sanctions. In such a setting, being a Black person for a White police officer is not only a physical attribute but is also a great source of danger even when the former may not represent one. In such a situation, all Black people tend to look alike for White police officers. They are either drug dealers, smugglers, robbers or deemed in possession of firearms even when they have a license authorizing them to have one. The status of Black people for a White officer is *captioned as a threat*, namely public villains who need to be dealt with by all means. In fact, the greatest threat posed by the Black people appears to be in the mind of white police officers.

¹¹¹ Christopher J. Lebron, *The Making of Black Lives Matter*, 28.

In his book titled *The Making of Black Lives Matter*, Lebron notes that “the years following and leading up to momentous opportunities for black freedom were filled with murderous racial terror.”¹¹² The same thought is more developed in a document titled *Ku Klux Klan— An American Story, Birth of the Invisible Empire*¹¹³ diffused ARTE portraying how the brutality against Black people in the American context tend to appear each time White people feel that Black people are gaining grounds and where their standard of life can be more beneficial. Hence one can understand that the harsh forces against Black people are an unswerving reminder that there still a very long way to and have to thrive against the clusters of dehumanization.

Rachel R. Hardeman, Eduardo M. Medina, and Katy B. Kozhimannil state that: “disproportionate use of lethal force by law-enforcement officers against communities of colour is not new.”¹¹⁴ Making some history Lebron underlines that “more than 3,400 black Americans were lynched between 1862 and 1968”¹¹⁵ and since the floodgate of death of Black people, unjustly, by White people continue to pour until people “we increasingly have video evidence of the traumatizing and violent experiences of black Americas.”¹¹⁶

¹¹² Ibid., 29.

¹¹³ “Ku Klux Klan - An American Story (1/2) - Birth of the Invisible Empire - Watch the Full Documentary,” ARTE, accessed November 4, 2020, <https://www.arte.tv/en/videos/092135-001-A/ku-klux-klan-an-american-story-1-2/>.

¹¹⁴ Rachel R. Hardeman, Eduardo M. Medina, and Katy B. Kozhimannil, “Structural Racism and Supporting Black Lives — The Role of Health Professionals,” *The New England journal of medicine* 375, no. 22 (2016): 1.

¹¹⁵ Christopher J. Lebron, *The Making of Black Lives Matter*, 29.

¹¹⁶ Hardeman, Medina, and Kozhimannil, “Structural Racism and Supporting Black Lives — The Role of Health Professionals,” 1.

The death of Trayvon Martin in February 2012, at Sanford in Florida and the acquittal of George Zimmerman and other charges dropped against several White police officers responsible for the deaths of Black people: Michael Brown in Ferguson, Eric Gardner in New York, Keith Lamont Scott in Charlotte... etc and the most recent the death of George Floyd are among a series of killing of Black people by White police officers that did not leave people—Black and some Whites- unmoved. The cruel and indiscriminate killing of Black people at the hands of the White police officer who are supposed to protect them and the indifference of society in general and the criminal justice system in particular lead my attention to another aspect as result of the systemic racism. I refer to the inequality.

Inequality

In the scuffle that ensued as a result of George Floyd's death, Heather Long and Andrew Van Dam published an article in Washington Post on June 4, 2020, titled "The black-white economic divide is as wide as it was in 1968."¹¹⁷ In this article, the two journalists underscore the significance of the current inequality between White people and Black people, which has remained unchanged since 1968. They stipulate that 'white wealth has soared while black wealth has stagnated.' Their analysis shows that "in 1968, a typical middle-class black household had \$6,674 in wealth compared with \$70,786 for the typical middle-class white household"¹¹⁸ and they go on to say that 'in 2020, are respectively \$13 024 and \$ 149 703dollars.

¹¹⁷ Heather Long and Andrew Van Dam, "Analysis | The Black-White Economic Divide Is as Wide as It Was in 1968," *Washington Post*, n.d., accessed November 3, 2020,

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/06/04/economic-divide-black-households/>.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

Experts¹¹⁹ argue that in 2020, Black Americans have a median income that is still lower than it was in 2000, by about \$2,000. They reveal that the unemployment rate is twice as high among the black communities, 6.6% compared to 3.6% among white communities in the first quarter of 2020. The wealth gap between Black people and White people is significant and has endured over several generations, according to Raj Chetty.¹²⁰ The latter explains that social mobility remains at a standstill for the black communities. The situation of Black people remains precarious with difficulties in accessing education and well-paid jobs. The mistaken impression one might have is to think of the Black people as a bunch of lazy people. As I showed in the introductory chapter, the unfavorable situation of Black people in the United States is deeply rooted in slavery and structural racism. As Hardeman, Medina, and Kozhimannil point out that: “Structural racism—a confluence of institutions, culture, history, ideology, and codified practices that generate and perpetuate inequity among racial and ethnic groups—is the common denominator of the violence that is cutting lives short in the United States.”¹²¹ In the same thread, David R. Williams and Pamela Braboy Jackson maintains: “Residential segregation [which] is a central mechanism by which racial economic inequality has been created and reinforced in the United States. It is a key determinant of the observed racial differences in SES

¹¹⁹ U. S. Congress. Joint Committee on Economic, “The Economic State of Black America in 2020. Congressional Publications,” 2020, accessed November 4, 2020, <https://search.proquest.com/congressional/view/app-gis/cisindex/2020-j842-207866>. See also Stan Veuger et al., “State of the Capital Region 2020,” *American Enterprise Institute Research Papers* (2020).

¹²⁰ See, Raj Chetty, *Race and Economic Opportunity in the United States An Intergenerational Perspective*, Working Paper Series (National Bureau of Economic Research) no. w24441 (Cambridge, Mass: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2018).

¹²¹ Hardeman, Medina, and Kozhimannil, “Structural Racism and Supporting Black Lives — The Role of Health Professionals,” 1.

[Socioeconomic Status] because it determines access to education and employment opportunities.¹²²

The anger that spread following the death of George Floyd¹²³ once again raised the question of the inequalities between the Black people and the rest of the country. It was due to this brutal death that the BLM movement resurfaced and firmly denounced not only police violence but also the many inequalities that undermined the economic situation of Black people which caused a considerable number of deaths in the black communities from the Covid-19 pandemic.

In their article Long and Dam state that: “The first economic victims of the covid-19 crisis were the service industries that employ disproportionate numbers of black and brown workers. As a result, after the Great Lockdown ... fewer than half of all black adults had a job.”¹²⁴ On the webpage designed by Johns Hopkins University to track the cases of Covid-19,

¹²² David R. Williams and Pamela Braboy Jackson, “Social Sources Of Racial Disparities In Health,” *Health Affairs* 24, no. 2 (March 2005): 328.

¹²³ On May 25, 2020, George Floyd, a 46-year-old black man, killed in Minneapolis, Minnesota, while being arrested for allegedly using a counterfeit bill spread far beyond the said state. During the arrest, Derek Chauvin, a white police officer with the Minneapolis Police Department, knelt on Floyd's neck for several minutes while he was already handcuffed and lying face down. Two police officers, J. Alexander Kueng and Thomas Lane aided Chauvin in restraining Floyd, while another officer, Tou Thao, prevented bystanders from interfering with the arrest and intervening as events unfolded. Floyd had complained about being unable to breathe while on the ground. However, after being restrained, he became more distressed, and continued to complain about breathing difficulties, the knee in his neck, and expressed the fear he was about to die and called for his mother. After several minutes passed Floyd stopped breathing. For a further two minutes, he lay motionless and officer Kueng found no pulse when urged to check. Despite this Chauvin refused pleas to lift his knee until medics told him to. See at: “Killing of George Floyd,” *Wikipedia*, November 4, 2020, accessed November 4, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Killing_of_George_Floyd&oldid=986983517.

¹²⁴ Long and Dam, “Analysis | The Black-White Economic Divide Is as Wide as It Was in 1968.”

where the “racial and ethnic information is currently available for only about 35% of the total deaths in the U.S... even this limited sample shows that Black Americans ...are experiencing infection and death rates that are disproportionately high for their share of the total population... Black Americans represent only about 13% of the population in the states reporting racial/ethnic information, they account for about 34% of total Covid-19 deaths in those states.”¹²⁵ Two main reasons were advanced to explain why Black people been largely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. First the inability to access the Health Care System and secondly the pre-existing health patterns due to poverty.

Conclusion

The transatlantic slave trade and racism have caused enormous suffering on Black people and led them in a daily struggle to strive. In front of their suffering, one can discover that it is necessary to let oneself be touched by the suffering of the other to be able to enter into compassion and find the meaning of the battle to change the present reality. Brutality and all sorts of threats still linger on the lives of Black people in America, but one can be aware that, in the face of suffering, there is always the possibility of doing something that can give one a new horizon on life. I have understood that life is sometimes found where it seems unrecognizable: in a wound, in pain, in hunger... I have learned that anything that makes us experience the possibility of death can lead to an even greater life. Knowing of the suffering of others leads necessarily towards awareness and an eagerness for a deeper change. This change can be built on the concept of “human dignity” on which I will develop the second chapter of that thesis.

¹²⁵ “COVID-19 Racial Data Transparency,” *Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center*, accessed November 3, 2020, <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/racial-data-transparency>.

CHAPTER II

READING SLAVERY AND RACISM THROUGH THE CONCEPTS OF HUMAN DIGNITY, AND PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR

This chapter addresses the concepts of “human dignity” and “the preferential option for the poor” linked to the burden of Black people. The concept of human dignity is listed among the tools through which all injustices are condemned¹²⁶, and constitutes the pillar on which an “alternative social structures”¹²⁷ can be built affirms, Pope Francis. The concept of preferential option for the poor, by its side, without being exclusive, indicates that those who have experienced dehumanized condition should be prioritized in the society concerns.¹²⁸ Recognizing the dignity of the poor¹²⁹ who have been treated as voiceless¹³⁰ creatures unjustly is fundamental in the process of moral change by placing them “at the heart of institutions, laws

¹²⁶ The promotion of human rights remains the most effective strategy for eliminating inequalities between countries and social groups, and for increasing security says Pope Benedict XVI. See at Benedict XVI, “Apostolic Journey to the United States: Address of the Holy Father to the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization in New York,” 2008.

¹²⁷ *Fratelli Tutti - On Fraternity and Social Friendship*. / Pope Francis, 2020, & 168.

¹²⁸ See, John Paul II, “Ecclesia in Asia (November 6, 1999) | & 34.”

¹²⁹ In this paper the word poor has a sociological dimension. It catches perfectly the situation of Black people as a sociological group who have been oppressed as group. Here, as John Sobrino underlines it, poor refers to “those for whom the basic things of life are so hard to achieve, those who live despised and outcast, who live under oppression, who, in short, have nothing to look forward to. See, Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993), 83.

¹³⁰ See, Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996).

and the workings of society.”¹³¹ For this reason, the concept of human dignity and preferential for the poor serve as tools, in the light of the Catholic social teaching, to denounce slavery and racism endured by Black people. This standpoint is not a mere academic affair but rather an essential one which deals with the daily survival of Black people.

Disgrace, humiliation, dehumanization, and death are the outcomes of slavery and racism. The dignity of Black people has been affected by all kind of threat for centuries. However, the question of how to overcome all these predicaments which genuinely burden the soul and the body of Black people prevails in this chapter. There is a need to elucidate the said question and shed more light on the pain Black people have experienced and continue to face throughout the world especially in the United States. To achieve this purpose, the framework of the teachings of the Catholic Church is analyzed. Though, it is unusual to observe that, despite the development of a vast array of theological considerations on the concept of human dignity, there have been few avenues of an in-depth study on the question of slavery, racism and a more commendable endeavor for Black lives within the Catholic tradition.¹³² The Catholic tradition tends to speak in general terms and may often lose sense of the fact that at a given time in history the church got involved in slavery.¹³³ In this light, the Church ought to have been its strongest opponents. To shed knowledge on the struggle of Black people induced by slavery and racism,

¹³¹ “Apostolic Journey to the United States: Address of the Holy Father to the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization in New York.”

¹³² See, Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States*.

¹³³ See, Bryan N. Massingale, “Has the Silence Been Broken? Catholic Theological Ethics and Racial Justice,” *Theological Studies* 75, no. 1 (March 2014): 133–155. See also, Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993), or James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2011). Or Thomas Murphy, *Jesuit Slaveholding in Maryland, 1717-1838*. (Florence: Routledge, 2018). Or, Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States*.

which are both “Christian, white and theological,”¹³⁴ I focus, first, on *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*¹³⁵ to illustrate that all human beings have been created in the image of God and secondly, I rely on liberation theology to call for a partiality for Black people since they have been violated by slavery and racism which make them poor.

Thus, this chapter comprises three main sections. First, I develop the concept of *Imago Dei* as the roots of the concept human dignity. This allows me to show that Black people are made of the Image of God and they are intrinsically dignified and must be deemed equal to everyone. This implies rejecting the misconceived ideology of white supremacy over the Black people. In other words, White people are not entitled to abuse Black people by assuming that they are the chosen “race” or to hold the view that Black people are the children of a lesser god. Secondly, I provide some understanding of the concept of human dignity rooted in the understanding of moral life and international conventions. Thirdly, I develop the concept of preferential for the poor to show why partiality should be applied in the case of the Black people since their oppressed condition makes them poor.

Black People as Imago Dei

Considering where Black people come from and the struggle they have been through, (always subject to great injustice, bearing existential wounds that only God's love can heal), it's worthwhile having theological reflection as our point of departure in the context of this chapter. Since the life of Black people has been affected by slavery and racism, I examine the works of

¹³⁴ See, Teel, *Racism and the Image of God*.

¹³⁵ John Paul II, “Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church,”

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html.

black liberation theologians, notably James H. Cone in his book, *A Black Theology of Liberation*¹³⁶ to formulate a theological reflection based on the burden of Black experience since “all theology is contextual.”¹³⁷ To achieve this, I choose to present Black people as *Imago Dei*. How can Black people be perceived as *Imago Dei* since they have suffered slavery and racism and continue to undergo the latter? To clarify this question, I rely on Gn 1: 26-27. In this scriptural passage, one can read:

God said, “Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves, and let them be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven, the cattle, all the wild animals and all the creatures that creep along the ground.” God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. (Gn1, 26-27)

The above passage of the scripture manifests the fundamental teaching that the human person is made in the image of God, in the *imago Dei*. It affirms that every human being is created by God: “God created man... male and female He created them.” It is worth underlining that God does not create his image by making man, rather He creates man in his image. According to Robinson: “Humanity itself is not, in fact, the ‘imago’, the image of God as though we reflect God in a mirror. Rather humanity is placed in a special relationship with God. This basic relationship marks humanity from all other creatures.”¹³⁸ It is not a statement about man but the creation of man by God. The creature that God envisions will have to be in relationship with him, to be in His likeness, so that a relationship can happen between him and God. This means that man is called by God to live up to his true nature that of a children-parents

¹³⁶ See, Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*.

¹³⁷ Landon, Michael (2005) “The Social Presuppositions of Early Liberation Theology,” *Restoration Quarterly*: Vol. 47: No. 1 , Article 3.

¹³⁸ Dominic Robinson, *Understanding the “Imago Dei”*: *The Thought of Barth, von Balthasar and Moltmann* (Farnham, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 9.□

relationship. Likewise, Pope John Paul II states: “man is [presented as] the result of a special decision on the part of God, a deliberation to establish a particular and specific bond with the Creator...The life which God offers to man is a gift by which God shares something of himself with his creature.”¹³⁹ Moreover, the Pope goes to say that : “The life which God bestows upon man is much more than mere existence in time. It is a drive towards fullness of life; it is the seed of an existence which transcends the very limits of time: "For God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity" (Wis 2:23).”¹⁴⁰

The fundamental origin of each human being is God. Quoting John Paul II, Pope Francis states: “... we were conceived in the heart of God, and for this reason ‘each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary...’”¹⁴¹ God who made humanity in his image is in Himself, the genesis, the beginning, the origin, the source of the human being.

Genesis 1 relates that God made everything and saw that it “was good.” Donald C. Carroll states that: “at the summit of creation stands the creation of men and women [men... males and females].”¹⁴² While *Gaudium et Spes* emphasizes that “...man is at the summit of God's creative activity, as its crown, at the culmination of a process which leads from indistinct chaos to the most perfect of creatures.”¹⁴³

¹³⁹ John Paul II, “*Evangelium Vitae* (25 March 1995).” § 34.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 1st edition. (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Pub, 2015).

¹⁴² Donald C. Carroll, “‘Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy’ by National Conference of Catholic Bishops,” *The Journal of law and religion* 6, no. 1 (1988): 9.

¹⁴³ John Paul II, “*Evangelium Vitae* (25 March 1995).” § 34.

The *CSDC* states: “Their companionship produces the primary form of interpersonal communion. For by his innermost nature man is a social being, and unless he relates himself to others he can neither live nor develop his potential.”¹⁴⁴ Further, the *CSDC* declares: “‘Male’ and ‘female’ differentiate two individuals of equal dignity, which does not, however, reflect latent equality, because the specificity of the female is different from the specificity of the male, and this difference inequality is enriching and indispensable for the harmony of life in society...”¹⁴⁵ Here it seems that the only difference that God has made concerns gender of both—male and female—whom are equal in dignity. Robinson relates that “...each human being has a ‘likeness’ to God. Each human person has a special dignity proper to himself which constitutes his own particular relationship with God ...”¹⁴⁶ Pope Francis is of the view that “The biblical accounts of creation invite us to see each human being as a subject who can never be reduced to the status of an object.”¹⁴⁷ Similarly, John Paul II says : “Man has been given a sublime dignity, based on the intimate bond which unites him to his Creator: in human being there shines forth a reflection of God himself.”¹⁴⁸ There is something truly worthwhile for every human being without discrimination. Hence, the question is no longer to say what human is like the image of God, but rather to explain why God created human being in his image in this case.

¹⁴⁴ *Gaudium et Spes*, " accessed October 28, 2020, §12.

http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

¹⁴⁵ “Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church,” § 146 accessed October 27, 2020,

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html#Creatures%20in%20the%20image%20of%20God.

¹⁴⁶ Robinson, *Understanding the “Imago Dei,”* 9.

¹⁴⁷ Francis, *Laudato Si’*, 1st edition. (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Pub, 2015), § 81.

¹⁴⁸ John Paul II, “*Evangelium Vitae* (25 March 1995),” § 34.

The Black people—male and female—created in the image of God, cannot find their full expression withdrawn from God. This creative link connects the human being to the One who made him, like how children are linked to their parents. And this bond also implies the need to live one's human life in relationship with the Creator God, to experience with Him a thriving communion that is a potent source of stability and fulfilment. Carroll underlines that "every human being possesses an inalienable dignity that stamps human existence prior to any division into races."¹⁴⁹ This is in complete contradiction to slavery and racism (white supremacy) which sought to dehumanize and continue to dehumanize Black people by consigning them into the rank of lesser beings as if they were mere objects.

In that sense, Copeland affirms that: "The narrative of human creation in Genesis and Christianity's murky role in chattel slavery, then directly confronts the attempt to degrade the imago Dei or image of God through commodifying, objectifying...and violating black."¹⁵⁰ By enslaving Black people White people "deform[s] the image of God in his own person."¹⁵¹ Citing the position of some abolitionists, deeply rooted in their faith, Johnson states:

Slavery *was* a sin because it *was* a crime against human nature and rebellion against God. By treating humans as assets and articles that could be bought and sold, slavery essentially turned people into 'things.' This not only contradicted God's purpose, but it also hindered man's relation to God. Slavery tilts the moral accountability of mankind by making slaves answerable to their human masters and not to God. In effect, slavery had shifted the order of creation by putting man above God, and slaveholders and God were competing for control over

¹⁴⁹ Carroll, "Economic Justice for All," 9.

¹⁵⁰ M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*, Innovations (Minneapolis, Minn.) (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 4.

¹⁵¹ John Paul II, "Evangelium Vitae (25 March 1995)." § 36.

mankind... slaveholders had stolen the humanity from their slaves and mankind from God.¹⁵²

God says: *Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves... God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him.* There is in those words of the God a very specific will which consists imprinting in human nature something that resembles Him. This narrative reveals the deepest of God's heart; by creating the human as one race, God chooses to create human being—male and female— in his image, in his likeness. Cone states, “It is the biblical concept of the image of God that makes the Black people fight for justice and freedom...When Black people affirm their nature of the image of God, they say no to White racists.”¹⁵³ In the vein Cone states: “The biblical concept of the image means that human beings are created in such a way that they cannot obey oppressive laws and still be human. To be human is to be in the image of God- that is, to be creative: revolting against everything that is opposed to humanity.”¹⁵⁴ This image of God who is part of the Black people is his justice. The *CSDC* states:

The likeness with God reveals that the essence and existence of man are constitutively related to God most profoundly. This is a relationship that exists in itself. It is therefore not something that comes afterwards and is added from the outside. The whole of man's life is a quest and a search for God. This relationship with God can be ignored or even forgotten or dismissed, but it can never be

¹⁵² Walter Johnson and Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition, eds., *The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave Trades in the Americas* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 99.

¹⁵³ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 93.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

erased. Indeed, among all the world's visible creatures, the only man has a “capacity for God” (‘homo est Dei capax’).¹⁵⁵

The name of God is His person, his nature. Man, the image of God, is worthy because God is eminently worthy. God is worthy because he is Lord, “eternal law, infinite justice, absolute freedom, mistress of herself, omnipotence which “consists in showing mercy.”¹⁵⁶ As a result of the fact that Black people share in God’s goodness, they must live as God wants: free from slavery and racism, and be treated as human beings. Consequently, Black people are in the image of God and as such have the dignity of a person: they are not “objects” but human. John Paul II notes that: “In the life of man, God's image shines ... “reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature’ (Heb 1:3). He is the perfect image of the Father.”¹⁵⁷

The concept of the image of God indicates that human beings share the same condition, thereby providing a firm foundation for the value of human dignity, beyond a mere social practice. Since justice is the nature of God in whom Black people find their source of being, they are summoned to fight against all forms of injustice and oppression which tempt to dehumanize them preventing them to enjoy their full divine nature. For those who have suffered slavery and racism, injustice works against God's goodness for all mankind. Justice comes to establish what is good for Black people and makes free from all kind of impression. Black people bear the image of God and therefore possess inherent dignity. Since they are the image of God, they are

¹⁵⁵ “Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church,” § 109, accessed October 27, 2020, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html#Creatures%20in%20the%20image%20of%20God.

¹⁵⁶ Saint Thomas, *Summa of Theology*, II-IIae, Q.30, a.4, quoted by Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, § 6.

¹⁵⁷ John Paul II, “*Evangelium Vitae* (25 March 1995).” § 36.

“master[s] of all earthly creatures”¹⁵⁸ and master of themselves. No one has the right to determine their life. In the same sense John Paul II says “Man's life comes from God; it is his gift, his image and imprint, a sharing in his breath of life. God therefore is the sole Lord of this life: man cannot do with it as he wills.”¹⁵⁹

Their dignity has its roots or participates in divine dignity. The dignity of Black people is the image of the lordship of God. The dignity of Black people consists in being in the image of God's attributes, but also in being particularly in the image of the dignity of God, that is, “master of all earthly creatures.”¹⁶⁰ Black people, the image of God, are worthy because God is eminently worthy.

What is man that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?
Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings,
and crowned him with glory and honor.
You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet. ¹⁶¹

Given that every life is intrinsically linked to the divine person of the creator, it is hard to understand why, despite the volumes of writing on the *Imago Dei*, that few authors, in the past decades, had barely focused their research on the Image of God to the Black people. Despite the cry of Black people under the weight of humiliation and dehumanization of slavery and racism, white theology has insufficiently emphasized, to not say it is totally absent in their ethical theology, that Black people possess an intrinsic value names dignity. If theology seeks to give meaning of man' relationship to God, are we to contend that Black people are children of lesser

¹⁵⁸ Pope Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes*. §12-3.

¹⁵⁹ John Paul II, “*Evangelium Vitae* (25 March 1995).” § 39.

¹⁶⁰ Pope Paul VI, “*Gaudium et Spes*.” § 12-3.

¹⁶¹ Ps 8:4- 6.

God? The question may be answered in the negative. Theology must have assessment base to seek for the truth that frees man from untold bias and discrimination for God is a God of diversity who loves all human beings without exception. This what the following section seeks to unveil.

White Theology and the Absence of the Black Suffering in America Discuss

There is a need to question the real commitment of the Church as an Institution which could prevent the evil of racism in destroying literally part of the body of Christ to which Black people belong as well. Quoting James H. Cone, Massingale states: “ It is amazing that racism could be so prevalent and violent in American life and yet so absent in white theological discourse.”¹⁶² On his side, Michael P. Jaycox states: “The fact that only a relatively small number of Catholic ethicists have published any research on the issue reveals the deep structural and ideological complicity of Catholic ethics as an academic community in this pervasive moral evil.”¹⁶³ In this sense one can appeal to James H. Cone who critiques theologians in the United States by developing a “white theology... a theology of white oppressors... by defining Christianity as compatible with white racism.”¹⁶⁴ This explains the reason why Jean-Pierre Fortin notes by quoting David R. Williams in the following way:

Decades of research on racial attitudes in the U.S. confirms the fact that there is more racial prejudice in the Christian church than outside it, that church members are more prejudiced than non-members, that churchgoers are more biased than those who do not attend, and that regular attendee is more prejudiced than those

¹⁶² Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, 44.

¹⁶³ Jaycox, “Black Lives Matter and Catholic Whiteness,” 2.

¹⁶⁴ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 22.

who attend less often. It's also been shown that persons who hold conservative theological beliefs are more likely to be prejudiced than those who do not.¹⁶⁵

In his time, James Baldwin held that, in observing the Church: “there was no love in the Church. It was a mask for hatred and self-hatred and despair.”¹⁶⁶ I point out those critiques, because I claim, as Fortin affirms: “Embracing Christ as God entails recognizing the equal and absolute dignity of all human beings, acknowledging oneself as member of the unique human community created and fulfilled in him.”¹⁶⁷ Since “human dignity” is so fundamental in the Gospel, what can one say about it regarding the Black people? Given that the concept of “human dignity” is an inseparable bond between the human and God. How can I rely on this concept to appeal for equality for Black people? What does the concept of “human dignity” suggest in the context of the suffering of Black People?

Human Dignity/ Black Dignity

The tragedy of Black people being prey to slavery and racism unveils an existential wound that shackled and damaged their life. Enslavement and racist acts affect their inmost being. These acts infringe the dignity and humanity of one category of people at the expense of the other. However, their humanity and their dignity are the first reason for why they should be valued and respected equally before everyone. Joined together, these two words, “dignity” and

¹⁶⁵ Jean-Pierre Fortin, “White Church or World Community? James Baldwin’s Challenging Discipleship”, *Journal of Moral Theology*, Vol. 9, No.2 (2020), 51.

¹⁶⁶ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 1st Vintage International ed. (New York: Vintage International, 1993), 306.

¹⁶⁷ Jean-Pierre Fortin, “White Church or World Community? James Baldwin’s Challenging Discipleship”, 47.

“humanity” shade light on why Black lives matter. Their lives matter not simply because they are Black, but because they are first and foremost human beings like any other as Image of God.

The notion of human dignity has its own history. Let's examine its etymological meaning by considering the two words separately. On one hand, the word dignity originates from the Latin *Dignitas*. It means worthy, majestic beauty, virtue, honor, consideration, esteem. It indicates respect and forethought. On the other hand, the word human refers to all that involves the human being in general. Applied to the human being, the word dignity means nothing less than this: the human being is infinitely above any price. As it is well said par the philosopher Immanuel Kant “is above all price.”¹⁶⁸

On December 10, 1948, after becoming aware of the atrocity of the Shoah, and also to find a common ethical language given the Universal Declaration of Rights, the term dignity was used. It appears in the initial narrative of the preamble: “Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.” Article 1 states: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and must act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” In this universal declaration, two points are particularly striking: a) It recognizes that the foundation of the equality of human rights and their inalienable character (literally “that cannot be taken away from anyone”) is the dignity of all members of the human family without exception. b) It recognizes that the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world is human dignity. Thus, human dignity becomes the principle that a person should never be treated as an object or a means but as an intrinsic entity. On this basis, one can maintain that dignity is the singular character of every person who has to be valued. It is the most

¹⁶⁸ Immanuel Kant and Mary J. Gregor, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Cambridge texts in the history of philosophy (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 73.

intrinsic value of each person, that is why every human can discover it: in oneself and also in others. It is inherent. No one can grant it and it is not in any one's power to take it away from anybody. Habermas states: "The concept of human dignity transfers the content of a morality of equal respect for everyone ... as subjects of equal actionable rights."¹⁶⁹ Dignity characterizes every human being and therefore prohibits slavery and all forms of discrimination, prejudice and racism against anybody in particular the Black people whom have been disvalued. In the name of his dignity, the Black person must not be dismissed as a thing. The Archbishop of Westminster, Vincent Nichols, asserts that the concept of human dignity indicates "how to fulfil the moral task of discovering and understanding more deeply what it means to be fully human,"¹⁷⁰ what Darlene Fozard Weaver, Associate Provost for Academic Affairs at Duquesne University, names "normative dignity."¹⁷¹

The recognition of the dignity of the Black people is not only the initial step toward the complete and complete integration as a member of the human community. It is also a fundamental action in the process of healing, acknowledging the injustice and oppression (slavery and racism) they have suffered and by which (racism) they continue to be victimized. It foundational for a just society, as it is said in the *CCC* : "A just society can become a reality only when it is based on the respect of the transcendent dignity of the human person. The person

¹⁶⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Crisis of the European Union: A Response* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2012), 77.

¹⁷⁰ Nichols Vincent. "Qu'est-ce-que la dignité humaine".
<https://www.la-croix.com/Urbi-et-Orbi/Archives/Documentation-catholique-n-2498/Qu-est-ce-que-la-dignite-humaine-2013-04-09-934385>. Consulted on August 29, 2020.

¹⁷¹ Darlene Fozard Weaver, "Christian Anthropology and Health Care" (n.d.), accessed November 9, 2020, <https://www.chausa.org/publications/health-care-ethics-usa/archives/issues/fall-2018/christian-anthropology-and-health-care>.

represents the ultimate end of society, by which it is ordered to the person.”¹⁷² In the same vein Pope John Paul II states that: “Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God', and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end.”¹⁷³ In this sense, human dignity originates in the creative act of God who, in creation, sets man apart. As the CCC claims, “Being in the image of God, the human individual possesses the dignity of a person, who is not just something, but someone. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons. And he is called by grace to a covenant with his Creator, to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can give in his stead. [...]”¹⁷⁴

Slavery and racism, which hinder, the dignity of the Black people is a sin because “Sin is a theological concept that describes the separation of man from the source of his being.”¹⁷⁵ In their pastoral letter titled “Open Wide our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love a Pastoral Letter Against Racism”, the USCCB strongly condemns racism. They allege that “racism is sinful... Racist acts are sinful because they violate justice.... Racism occurs because a person ignores the fundamental truth that [...] all equally made in the image of God... Every racist act is a failure to acknowledge another person [...] created in the image of God.”¹⁷⁶

In its document, entitled, “Dignity and Rights of the Human Person,” the International Theological Commission states that the notion of human dignity allows: “... everyone to become more acutely and profoundly aware of the injustices committed against human persons... But... it

¹⁷² John Paul II, “Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church.” § 132.

¹⁷³ John Paul II, “Evangelium Vitae (25 March 1995,)” § 53.

¹⁷⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 357.

¹⁷⁵ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 186.

¹⁷⁶ USCCB. *Idem* p. 3.

affirms that the ultimate foundation of this autonomy and these freedoms lies in man's relationship with the supreme divine transcendence, whatever the diversity of interpretation given to this absolute superior to man.”¹⁷⁷ This dignity is inalienable and must be defended from conception to death. What Weaver, calls “Inherent dignity”. For her, “Inherent dignity is something humans have, regardless of abilities or aptitudes.”¹⁷⁸ The dignity of Black people therefore comes from the gift of God. It is not measurable and goes beyond the differentiated characteristics that constitute the unique identity of White and Black.

For the Church, the dignity of the human person is expressed in particular in human intelligence and conscience. “Man judges rightly that by his intellect he surpasses the material universe, for he shares in the light of the divine mind.”¹⁷⁹ The Pope further declares, “For man has in his heart a law written by God; to obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it, he will be judged.”¹⁸⁰ And consciousness is necessarily free: “man’s dignity demands that he act according to a knowing and free choice that is personally motivated and prompted from within, not under blind internal impulse nor by mere external pressure.”¹⁸¹

The recognition and defense of the dignity of Black people must be the concern of everyone, through charity and fraternity: “everyone must consider his every neighbor without exception as another self, taking into account first of all His life and the means necessary to

¹⁷⁷ The International Theological Commission, *Dignity and Rights of the Human Person*, &, 1.1; 1.3.
At the Holy See:
http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_1983_dignita-diritti_en.html

¹⁷⁸ Darlene Fozard Weaver, “Christian Anthropology and Health Care.”

¹⁷⁹ Pope Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes, The Church in the Modern World*, 1965, § 15.

¹⁸⁰ *ibid*, § 16.

¹⁸¹ *ibid*, § 17

living it with dignity.”¹⁸² As it well said by Weaver “the dignity of all cannot be fully respected apart from practices of inclusive regard. Moreover, since we are social creatures who therefore depend on one another for our well-being, not only your dignity but my dignity really depends on this practice.”¹⁸³ This notion of human dignity helps one to see oneself in the other. In the name of their dignity, Black people must be respected. As *Imago Dei*, dignity is given to Black people. The dignity of Black people precedes the will of the slavers and the racists and requires from them a proportionate and fair attitude toward Black people: to recognize and accept them as persons who have a supreme value.

This singular value of the dignity of Black people is a call for unconditional and utter respect to everyone Black included. Such respect must extend to all human beings: White people and Black people. By his very nature as part of God, the origin of all humans, every human being— White and Black—is in himself worthy and worthy of respect. Thus, “for no reason can he [Black person] be made subject to other human [White] and almost reduced to the level of a thing,”¹⁸⁴ since they are all equals.

Even if Black people are the victims of slavery and racism, but it is the task of every— Black and White. In the same vein, it is said in the Compendium ": Together with equality in the recognition of the dignity of each person and every people, there must also be an awareness that it will be possible to safeguard and promote human dignity only if this is done as a community, by the whole of humanity. Only through the mutual action of individuals and peoples sincerely concerned for the good of all men and women can a genuine universal brotherhood be

¹⁸² Pope Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes, The Church in the Modern World*, 1965, § 27-1.

¹⁸³ Darlene Fozard Weaver, “Christian Anthropology and Health Care.”

¹⁸⁴ John Paul II, “*Evangelium Vitae* (25 March 1995).” § 34.

attained.”¹⁸⁵ In the same vein Weaver affirms that “the dignity of all cannot be fully respected apart from practices of inclusive regard. Moreover, since we are social creatures who therefore depend on one another for our well-being, not only your dignity but my dignity really depends on this practice. That is, my own dignity (as a marker or consequence of human flourishing) waxes or wanes as I nurture inclusive regard for the inherent dignity of others.”¹⁸⁶ The other reveals oneself whom oneself really is. This what Emmanuel Levinas then to explain by the famous concept “the face.”¹⁸⁷ It is through the face of the other that ones dignity as creature of God shines forth and calls to respond with respect, to treat one another as having inestimable value.

In the name of their dignity, Black people must be respected and treated as sons and daughters of God who made them in his image. Because of who they are, Black people have to fight against all kinds of evil structures which seek to hinder their life. Every human being has inherent dignity and value, simply because of his or her fundamental condition as a human being. That is why Black people should be treated as subjects capable of dependent and creative actions. Since Blacks can make choices, they must be treated as an end in themselves and not simply as a means that “supremacist culture”¹⁸⁸ allows exploiting. In other words, Black people must not be used and treated as objects.

The inherent dignity of every human person is the grounds of justice for every society, which must guard against treating Black people as a means. A just society can only be achieved

¹⁸⁵ John Paul II, “Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church.” § 145.

¹⁸⁶ Darlene Fozard Weaver, “Christian Anthropology and Health Care.”

¹⁸⁷ See, Jeffrey Bloechl, ed., *The Face of the Other and the Trace of God: Essays on the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, 1st ed., Perspectives in continental philosophy no. 10 (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000).

¹⁸⁸ Jaycox, “Black Lives Matter and Catholic Whiteness,” 313.

where respect for the transcendent dignity of every human person prevails. As the CSDC states “Only the recognition of human dignity can make possible the common and personal growth of everyone (cf. Jas 2:1-9). To stimulate this kind of growth it is necessary for particular to help the least, effectively ensuring conditions of equal opportunity for men and women and guaranteeing an objective equality between the different social classes before the law.”¹⁸⁹ Thus, the society can be in peace. In fact, a peaceful society is where every single person has the same right and is treated as the Imago Dei without exception. That is why a special consideration should be given to those whom have lived in vulnerable position. It is true that the morality of a society is measured by how it treats its most vulnerable members. In consequence, since Black people are very vulnerable, their case requires that explicit positions be taken in their favors. This is what I demonstrate in the following section based on the concept of “the preferential option for the poor” as an ethical principle to ensure that the dignity of Black people is recognized and respected. I rely on the Liberation Theology to develop it as decision makers to consider the well-being of Black people, who have been systematically oppressed in US society.

The Preferential Option for the Poor

Before developing the concept of the preferential option for the poor in relation to the situation of Black people, I want to make a few clarifications in order to avoid all kinds of misinterpretations or to avoid, as the racists do, taking Black people as a compact mass without faces either identity. Here, I am talking about Black people as “poor” in the sense of a social category, victims of slavery and racism. I do not mean that all Black people are economically poor. I rather say that all Black people are victims, without exception, of white supremacy

¹⁸⁹ John Paul II, “Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church.” § 145.

around the world and especially here in the United States. It is only in this sense that I refer to Black people as “poor.” Hence, Hannah Arendt allows me to clarify: to be poor is not to have “the right to have rights”¹⁹⁰ as slaveholders and racists sought to reduce Black people to animality preventing them enjoying their full right. Pope Francis brilliantly points out, the poor, [Black people in the context of my research], are the “society’s most neglected members.”¹⁹¹ In all major texts of the teaching of the Church, the poor are those who live in “subhuman conditions” which undermine their dignity. And it is to this category that Jesus identified himself (Mt 25: 40). Gustavo Gutiérrez reminds that “The heart of Jesus’ message is the proclamation of the love of God that is expressed in the proclamation of his kingdom. The kingdom is the final meaning of history; its total fulfillment takes place beyond history, and at the same time it is present from this moment on.”¹⁹²

Drawing the link to the Bible, Sobrino underlines that “one must stress that the Synoptics speak of the poor in the plural, not of poor individuals or the sum total of poor individuals, but of a reality—be it understood as a group or a class—that is collective and massive and sufficiently defined in historical terms. ‘The poor,’ in the plural, are spoken of in the beatitudes; ‘crowds’ of the sick in the summaries; and the ‘multitudes’ who listened to Jesus are often mentioned.”¹⁹³

For centuries, poverty has appeared as something inevitable, even normal as it was the case of reducing Black people into slavery. Most of the time, people talk about the poor without considering the social factors that make them poor. In the first chapter, I showed that the poor

¹⁹⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New ed., A Harvest book HB244 (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), 298.

¹⁹¹ Pope Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes*. & 186.

¹⁹² Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1988), 323.

¹⁹³ Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 83.

condition of life of Black people in the United States is the result of long processes of dehumanization starting by slavery and stacks in racism that sought to death of Black people. In this sense, poverty, the daughter of slavery and racism, is contrary to life. It is an injustice. Therefore, it must be fought by taking explicitly defense for those who are victims of history as it develops by Johann Baptist Metz.¹⁹⁴ In the same vein Gutiérrez relates that:

This relationship with history and the challenge of poverty implies an important change in the task of theology. While we have long pigeonholed poverty as a social issue, our perception of poverty is now deeper and more complex, and no longer limited to its economic dimension (as important as this may be). Instead, we now understand that being poor means being rendered socially insignificant due to ethnic, cultural, gender, and/or economic factors. Poverty's inhumane and antievangelical character, as Medellín and Puebla put it, and its final outcome of early and unjust death make it totally clear that poverty goes beyond the socioeconomic sphere to become a global human problem ...¹⁹⁵

It is only in this sense that the expression preferential option for the poor can help us to guide our choice of action in relation to the situations of Black people. What does the preferential option for the poor mean?

The expression "preferential option for the poor" has its roots in Latin American. It comes primarily from the current of "Liberation Theology" with the conference of Latin American bishops at Puebla, then it appeared in the papal documents with Pope John Paul II with a slight modification "preferential love of the poor." Hence, the preferential option for the poor, in line with Liberation Theology, urges both to care and serve the marginalized and to find Christ within.

¹⁹⁴ See, Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, A Crossroad book (New York: Seabury Press, 1980).

¹⁹⁵ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 322.

All the documents show that the preferential option for the poor is linked to the very heart of the Christian faith. It is an invitation “to imitate the life of Christ.”¹⁹⁶ Pope John Paul II specifies that “This love excludes no one, but simply embodies a priority of service to which the whole Christian tradition bears witness.”¹⁹⁷ It does not imply a rejection or disinterest in those who are not poor, but it clearly emphasizes that those who live “subhuman conditions” are entitled to the first place in the concern of the society. This in this sense that Francis Schüssler Fiorenza points out that “the importance of the preferential option for the poor exists because so many of the injustices to them and their conditions are invisible to many others. Today in the United States, ... the issue of the invisibility of racism... This should lead [them] to focus on present practices and patterns that continue the racism against others in society.”¹⁹⁸ In this sense it is not an optional option but a choice to which everyone is invited. It is part of the Christian vocation shared by all, even if everyone - individuals and groups - can contribute in a differentiated way. As, the United States of Conference of Catholic Bishops state : “The prime purpose of this special commitment to the poor is to enable them to become active participants in the life of society. It is to enable all persons to share in and contribute to the common good.”¹⁹⁹ Pope Francis insists especially that it is not “a question of a mission reserved only to a few”²⁰⁰ and that “none of us can think we are exempt from concern for the poor and for social justice.”²⁰¹

¹⁹⁶ John Paul II, “Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (30 December 1987).” & 34.

¹⁹⁷ John Paul II, “Ecclesia in Asia (November 6, 1999).”& 34.

¹⁹⁸ Francis Schüssler Fiorenza , “ Faith, Hope, and Love and the Challenge of Justice”, 93. In, Anselm Kyongsuk Min editor, *Faith, Hope, Love, and Justice: The Theological Virtues Today* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, an imprint of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc, 2018).

¹⁹⁹ Carroll, ““Economic Justice for All,” 201.

²⁰⁰ Pope Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes*.& 188.

²⁰¹ Ibid. & 201.

Given the gravity of dehumanization experienced by Black people, being poor cannot be summed up in a single word: it is a cry that crosses the heavens and reaches God. What does the cry of the Black people express, if not the weight of suffering, exclusion, exploitation, disappointment, and also hope? One can ask himself of herself: how is it possible that this cry that goes up to God does not reach the ears of the oppressors, leaving them indifferent?

The responses of God for the poor – Black people- have taken many forms in history. Those responses are always aimed at healing the deep wounds of Black people by fighting for their justice. The responses of God have always been a call to anyone to act for and in the names of the voiceless within the limits of the human condition without fear. Black Lives Matter embodies one of the responses of God. BLM is presented as a response from God taking part for a category whom have suffered all kinds of injustice. I explain the case of Black Lives Matter in the subsequent chapter showing the importance of their struggle for a better life of Black people.

Conclusion

Since everyone is made in the image of God, God confers to everyone the dignity which takes roots in His own being. A person is worthy because he is the son of God. And because he is a son of God, he deserves to be treated as such since his/her dignity is rooted in God Himself. The concept of human dignity is foundational and serves as a reminder that every person is valuable. This notion gives us something to fight against everything that hinders the lives of Black people and prevents them from developing their full potentials as children worthy of God. All of who believe in human dignity cannot remain unmoved against all kind of threats emanating racist based hatred that separate people putting one category on above or beyond another. It is this deep belief that justify the partiality in the fight for those who are poor because they have lived some subhuman conditions. All are Imago Dei; Black people have been treated

as if not. Because Black people are imago Dei they all have equal and transcendent value and worth. In order to respect the dignity of Black people (who have suffered from systemic racism) Christians need to employ a Preferential Option for the Poor, and first and foremost opt for Black persons.

CHAPTER III

ORGANIZING FOR HUMAN DIGNITY: THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT

In the preceding chapters, the tragic journey of Black people, from their capture in Africa to their enslavement in the Americas, has been depicted as a long journey of struggle. During more than four centuries, Black men, women, and children have been uprooted from the continent of Africa, separated from their loved ones, to be sold as commodities. Chained, humiliated, and reduced to animals, they were taken to America. It was the transatlantic slave trade. The first chapter describes the transatlantic slave trade, through the journey of the slaves, as one of the greatest tragedies in the history of humanity. The heinous actions of White people against Black people during the slave trade represented the willingness of White slave masters and some captains to undermine the very essence of Black people: their inherent dignity. The second chapter sought, based on the concept of human dignity, to provide contents why Black people should be respected and treated as a subject because as a human being, created in Image of God, they bear an intrinsic worth. In this sense, slavery violated the inherent dignity of the Black people. For have been living the subhuman conditions of slavery, and continue to undergo the weight of racism, the notion “preferential option for the poor” must be applied for Black people.

In fact, the first chapter has noted that the life of Black people in the Americas, from the early beginning till now has turned out to be a never-ending struggle of survival, an unswerving reality in which not much has changed. The old demons of the past seem alive than ever before couched and embedded in political, economic, and social structures. In the second chapter, the concept of ‘human dignity’ has been presented as a tool to condemn slavery and racism which crucify the presence of the divine in the Black people. The intrinsic value of Black people as

Imago Dei which confers on them that divine identity of God's children. They must be treated humanely. The second chapter endeavors to examine the notion "preferential option for the poor" that should prioritize Black people.

Unfortunately, the evil of racism in its most pernicious forms continues to exist in the United States and leads to the death of a great number of Black people and their mass incarceration on trivial bases. Black people continue to be seen as criminal, treated as inferior. Racism continues to hit Black people with all its power under the arms of White people in the United States. The sheer physical appearance of Black people in the United States places them in a position of inferiority and therefore at risk of potential harm to their person at all levels in the American society. Both, the transatlantic slave trade, and racism, are a crime committed by White people against Black people. Both are an unacceptable scandal and contrary to the will of God since they violate the inherent dignity of Black people. Christians are called to defend the dignity of Black people as a marginalized group within the American society. Pope Paul VI states that, "We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man, created as he is in the image of God. Man's relation to God the Father and his relation to men his brothers have so linked together that Scripture says: 'He who does not love does not know God' (1 John 4:8)."²⁰² Further, the Pope says "The Church reproves, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against men [human beings] or harassment of them because of their race, color, condition of life, or religion."²⁰³ Pope Francis reminds that "We cannot tolerate or turn a blind eye to racism and exclusion in any form and yet claim that we defend the sanctity of

²⁰² Pope Paul VI, "Nostra Aetate," &5. See at: http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html.

²⁰³ Ibid.

every human life.” Therefore, it is inconceivable for those who receive the Gospel message to deny fundamental human equality in the name of the alleged superiority of one category of people over another. It is in this context that Pope Francis asserts “every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural [...] is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent. For in truth, it must still be regretted that fundamental personal rights are still not being universally honored.”²⁰⁴ Christians and all people of goodwill are called to fight together with the evil of racism by openly supporting Black people since they have been treated like poor. One option is to support the movement of Black Lives Matter.

After to the Georges Floyd’s death, “Bishop Seitz and his priests knelt in prayer for that same nine minutes that George Floyd had been knelt on, and held signs reading, “Black Lives Matter.”²⁰⁵ For Bishop Seitz “When religion becomes stagnant, we can forget that the Word always comes to us crucified and powerless.”²⁰⁶ In order to defend his position, he quotes James Cone’s view that “in America, the Word comes tortured, black and lynched.”²⁰⁷ He continue by underlining that “ Today, we meet Jesus in those tear-gassed, tased, strangled and snuffed out. That is the reason why the church teaches a preferential option for the poor. And why the church stands up for life wherever and whenever it is devalued and threatened.”²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ Pope Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes*, 1965 & 29.

²⁰⁵ Don Weigel, “Black Lives Matter and the Preferential Option for the Poor,” *Western New York Catholic*, July 1, 2020, accessed November 22, 2020, <https://wnycatholic.org/2020/07/01/black-lives-matter-and-the-preferential-option-for-the-poor/>.

²⁰⁶ “El Paso’s Bishop Mark Seitz: Black Lives Matter,” *National Catholic Reporter*, last modified 3:00am, accessed November 17, 2020, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/el-pasos-bishop-mark-seitz-black-lives-matter>.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

The deacon Don Weigel points to the fact that “There was some great confusion among Catholics about the appropriateness of a Catholic Bishop (Mark Seitz of El Paso) and Priests embracing the slogan ‘Black Lives Matter.’ However, there is an intimate connection between Black Lives Matter and the tenet of Catholic Social Teaching, the Preferential Option for The Poor.”²⁰⁹ Black Lives Matter affirms that systemic racism exists and must be replaced by a culture where humanity, contribution to society, and the resilience of the Black people are recognized and fostered. Some have objected that such reasoning puts Black people out in front and affords them special treatment. And in a sense, it does and must. The reason is that attention has to be placed where the problem is-and the problem being highlighted is the systemic racism that still exists in the United States of America.

Nevertheless, some maintain that it is more fitting to assert that “All Lives Matter,” but this misses the point because it assumes a God who is not deeply interested in the lives of human beings. It assumes a God who is not scandalized by the discrimination of some humans. If someone were to say “unborn lives matter” and her adversary responds with “All lives matter,” the adversary has missed the point that God sees the discrimination and murder of the unborn and is concerned. God Godself implores us “Unborn lives matter.”

As I underlined it in the second chapter, the idea of putting attention where it is needed most is the idea behind the Church’s “preferential option for the poor.” The phrasing of this idea lies at the core of *Octogesima Adveniens* written by Pope Paul VI in 1971. The latter underlines that “In teaching us charity, the Gospel instructs us in the preferential respect due to the poor and

²⁰⁹ See, Don Weigel, “Black Lives Matter and the Preferential Option for the Poor.”

the special situation they have in society.”²¹⁰ The concept was expanded by Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI to include anyone marginalized in society.

I have proven that Black Lives have not historically mattered, they have been killed and diminished. Therefore, they are part of the “poor” and the marginalized and covered by the notion “preferential for the poor.” Working to eliminate racism and asserting Black Lives Matter is necessary if we genuinely want to arrive together in the Kingdom of God.

Respect for the intrinsic worth of Black people means that Black people are not to be perceived or treated merely as instruments or objects of the will of white supremacy. The saying that “each Black person is as good as every other human being” may be construed as credible. Some would reasonably go beyond this to dispute that substantial equality is a basic requirement of respect for the inherent worth of Black people. With regards the way that Black people are treated, respect for their inherent dignity infer the far-reaching implications of a notion that has not yet been assigned substantial explicit content within the American society.

However, until now, almost no emphasis has been put on the efforts of Black people themselves in the way that they have dealt with all the discrimination allotted on them by White people. The record of their fights could have been so long to enumerate herein. However, I want to examine the fact BLM is an organization that promotes the dignity of Black people by explicitly employing the notion “preferential for the poor.”

On their long journey of affliction, Black people have led many different kinds of fight from revolt, passing through suicide, abortion, poisoning, fleeing, civil rights movement, Black Panthers and more recently BLM. Comprehending where Black people come from, one can

²¹⁰ Pope Paul VI, “Octogesima Adveniens,” last modified May 14, 1971, http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_p-vi_apl_19710514_octogesima-adveniens.html.

reasonably infer, that BLM is part of the continuity of a long history of struggle and hope that seeks to raise the awareness that recognition of the Black humanity has been hindered by white supremacy.

This final chapter examines the philosophical underpinnings of the BLM and its commitment to fighting racism and anti-Black violence, police brutality and all kind of violence—exclusion, exploitation, systemic inequalities— and exploring ways to subdue all the chains whether physical or mental oppression against Black humanity. In other words, BLM is portrayed as a community that strives to fight against white supremacy in all its forms by bringing hope and restoration to Black humanity. According to Jaycox, BLM is in itself “an appeal to a higher law of human dignity.”²¹¹ To fulfil this aim, I divide this chapter into four mains sections. Firstly, I situate the emergence of BLM in its context by putting the stress on its philosophy. Secondly, I explain why BLM represents a just way forward for Black people. Thirdly I demonstrate how BLM is dismantling the white supremacy. Fourth and lastly, I gave a concrete and significant example to show to what the actions of BLM lead too.

The Emergence of Black Lives Matter

Recognizing the trauma and the chaotic situations in which Black people have fallen, one might tend to believe that the evil (slavery, white supremacy, and racism) seems to have the power to restrain Black people in their primary vocation: living with dignity *like Imago Dei*. However, a closer look at the predicaments faced by Black People unveils a story of resilience. This seems to be true in the case of BLM, despite the weight of their trials and their suffering, they have fought and continue to fight to find a meaning for their lives. Based on this

²¹¹ Jaycox, “Black Lives Matter and Catholic Whiteness,” 337.

observation, I believe that it is reasonable to hold onto values that give hope even when the tides of the predicaments tend to blow in opposite directions. Mutilated and broken lives can probably be transformed into hope as it is presented in the case of BLM. Hence, what is BLM? How did BLM come about?

The birth of the BLM emerged in a particular circumstance. This occurred in 2013, following the acquittal of Zimmerman ²¹²— suspected of killing Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old African-American— the activist Alicia Garza²¹³, posted on her Facebook wall the following message started by those words: “essentially a love notes to Black People” then, at the end of her post, she wrote: “Black people. I love you. I love us. Our lives matter.” Another woman, named Patrisse Cullors,²¹⁴ replied by saying: “Black Lives Matter.” It was just a hashtag post at the

²¹²Michael Zimmerman (born October 5, 1983) a white American who fatally shot Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida, on February 26, 2012. On July 13, 2013, he was cleared of all charges in Florida. After his acquittal, Zimmerman himself was the target of a shooting, which resulted in a conviction for attempted murder against the perpetrator. On December 4, 2019, Zimmerman sued the Martin family and others involved in the trial for \$100 million on grounds of false evidence and abuse of process. On February 18, 2020, Zimmerman filed a defamation lawsuit for \$265 million against Pete Buttigieg and Elizabeth Warren. See at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Zimmerman.

²¹³ was born on January 4, 1981, in Los Angeles, California. She received her B.A. degree in anthropology and sociology in 2002 from the University of California, San Diego. In 2009, she served as executive director for People Organized to Win Employment Rights/POWER for the San Francisco Bay Area. In 2011, she was elected board chair for Right to the City Alliance/RTTC in Oakland, which fought gentrification and police brutality. In 2013, Garza co-founded the Black Lives Matter movement. In 2018, Garza founded the Black Futures Lab, which invites black people to experiment with new ways to build independent, progressive Black political power. She has served as a board member of Forward Together's Oakland branch, Black Organizing for Leadership and Dignity, and Oakland's School of Unity and Liberation/SOUL. See at : <https://www.thehistorymakers.org/biography/alicia-garza>.

²¹⁴ Born in Los Angeles, Patrisse Khan-Cullors, became an activist at 16. In 2012, she gained a religion and philosophy degree, toured her first performance art piece, Stained: An Intimate Portrayal Of State Violence, and founded Dignity And Power Now. In 2013, she co-founded Black Lives Matter. Her

beginning which will become later, with the help of Opal Tometi,²¹⁵ leader of another immigrant rights group, the movement of BLM as a formal organization. Seeing the context, BLM has emerged as a cry to raise awareness on the upsurge of racism and anti-Black violence and police brutality.

In its genesis, the BLM was often perceived as a simple civil right movement or an offshoot of the civil right movement of 1968. To dispel this confusion, Garrett Chase points to Opal Tometi's designation that "the aspirations of the movement (BLM) goes beyond the civil rights and the movement (BLM) characterizes itself as a human rights movement for 'the full recognition of our [Black people] rights as citizens; and it is a battle for full civil, social, political, legal, economic and cultural rights as enshrined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.'" ²¹⁶ On their official website, it is written: "BLM is an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks' humanity, our contributions to this

memoir, *When They Call You A Terrorist*, was published earlier this year. She is married to Janaya Khan, the co-founder of Black Lives Matter Canada, and lives in Los Angeles. Read on the page: "Q&A: Patrisse Khan-Cullors: 'My Favourite Word? Freedom,'" *The Guardian*, last modified March 24, 2018, accessed October 29, 2020, <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/mar/24/patrisse-khan-cullors-activist-black-lives-matter-interview>.

²¹⁵ Opal Tometi is a globally recognized human rights advocate, strategist and writer of Nigerian-American descent. She has been active in social movements for over 15 years and is widely known for her role as a co-founder of Black Lives Matter and her years of service as the Executive Director of the United States first national immigrant rights organization for people of African descent – the Black Alliance for Just Immigration. See at : <https://www.allamericanspeakers.com/celebritytalentbios/Opal+Tometi/399344>

²¹⁶ Chase, Garrett (2018) "The Early History of the Black Lives Matter Movement, and the Implications Thereof," *Nevada Law Journal*: Vol. 18 : Iss. 3 , Article 11. 1091.

society, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression.”²¹⁷ On the same site, further, it is precise, and probably by underlines a very important aspect, emphasizing that to “not replicating harmful practices that excluded so many in past liberation movements, we [BLM] committed to placing those at the margins closer to the center.”²¹⁸

To draw attention to the notion of Black humanity in the minds of White people, BLM was founded as a counter-response to the countless persecutions and killings which have paved Black lives throughout America. On their official website, it is said “We are unapologetically Black in our positioning. In affirming that Black Lives Matter, we need not qualify our position. To love and desire freedom and justice for ourselves is a prerequisite for wanting the same for others.”²¹⁹ By affirming its unapologetic position, BLM does not exclude others.

BLM aims to enlighten and raise awareness that Black people's lives are undervalued in the United States and Black people are often targeted unfairly. As Robin DiAngelo strongly asserts in his work that the Americans society is not yet so advanced as to have become truly color blind. By seeking to exclude — those who are designated perpetrators by the only fact that they are Blacks, the BLM helps to uncover that many White Americans of goodwill face the hard task of acknowledging that these societal ills (racism and anti-blackness) continue to endure, and that White privilege is a well and alive. Hence BLM is a sign of hope for the Black person.

²¹⁷ <https://blacklivesmatter.com/herstory/>

²¹⁸ “*Herstory*,” Black Lives Matter, accessed October 20, 2020, <https://blacklivesmatter.com/herstory/>.

²¹⁹ “Guiding Principles,” *BLMLA*, accessed November 23, 2020, <https://www.blmla.org/guiding-principles>.

BLM as Sign of Hope

Again, this section is showing that BLM, as an organization, enacts the Catholic Social Teaching principles of dignity and the notion “preferential for the poor.” The very existence of BLM attests that, despite the tragic journey of Black people, the flame of life—even though very feeble— and the appetite for living blends their everyday lives. The existence of BLM as a sign of hope sustains Black people to set sail on the stormy sea (systemic racism) they encounter in their everyday experiences in a white America. Here, Black people hope against all hope! BLM's existence justifies that Black people want to live! In one of her books, Marie M. Colard²²⁰ illustrates how life, despite its precariousness, confronts chaos. Her insight helps to recognize how vulnerable people affected by inhumane circumstances can find strength in healing. Based on her thought, BLM can be seen as a way of forging a new voice for the Black people amidst other voices. A voice which speaks on behalf of all the afflictions of Black people, and their crucifixions, like Christ on the cross: *My God why have you abandoned me?* (Mt 27:46). BLM reveals that God is always at work even where He seems to be totally absent.

If the touching and harsh struggle of Black people can be acknowledged as a crucifixion, BLM can be seen as an Easter Sunday or as a treasure hidden in the mud that unfolds the way to hope. A simplistic analysis of the Black people predicament often looms on their responsibility. The blame game seems to take the centre stage. It comes as no surprise to learn that Black people, in America, are to be blamed for being poor and that it will be difficult to get them out of their quagmire. They are sometimes criticized for not doing enough to avoid sinking so low as if living as wretch was a deliberate choice. It is striking and even breathtaking to see how prevalent

²²⁰ See, Marion Muller-Colard, *L'autre Dieu: la plainte, la menace et la grâce* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2017).

such an idea has come to stay in the American's society. A large proportion of the Church seem to tolerate the structure of sin which has taken and continue to take Black people's life.

Slavery, racism, and white supremacy have caused a lot of suffering and death among Black people. Every single Black person in America is a vivid witness of the suffering. That is the reason why BLM is a great response to the cry of Black people because it is built from different people who decided to put themselves together for a common good. This means that the trial of Black people makes them (BLM) aware of the importance of the meaning of living as brothers and sisters for fighting for the humanity of their pairs: a kind of benevolence and unconditional equality in belonging to the same human family where no one chooses themselves and where the only possibility to survive is to organize oneself as a family.

BLM raise the awareness that salvation always passes through others. Concurrently everyone becomes an actor and a beneficiary at the same time. This helps to discover hidden talents and put them to much use in the service of the community. In this sense, BLM is a call from God to do something to help Black people. And in the light of their action as Black people, they discover for themselves meaning to their lives and they are the first who have to fight for it.

BLM in itself helps the Black people and all the observers to understand that there is a need to fight for change, to prevent the exclusion and marginalization that has found fertile ground in the society. It is also to work for the “salvation of the world” which is the mission entrusted to us by Christ himself. BLM is an affirmation that injustice prevails when those who see it remain silence. The existence of BLM *per se* is an expression of faith that a better society can be built for the benefice of everyone. It, therefore, rejects the comforting relativism in which talks about racism seemed to hinge simply on a matter of politics. For BLM debates on racism without practical actions can appear like wordy theoretical preaching.

The very existence of BLM proved that despite they lived ruthless situation in which Black People live, there is a path of inner growth that leads to God by raising awareness of human fragility. As the great German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer rightly underscores: “not everything that happens is simply ‘God’s will’; yet in the last resort nothing happens ‘without God’s will’ (Matt. 10.29), i.e. through every event, however untimely, there is an opportunity to encounter God.”²²¹ BLM shows by caring for human fragility, it is possible to build a novel pattern of humanity, a more humane and supportive model in which God is the centre and every single human- Black/ White is bear the presence of God.

Surveying the first chapter which uncovers the pain of Black people and the second which asserts the presence of God in every human, it becomes clear that, in the face of human suffering God may seem “silent” though human beings hope that He does something. What is unexpected is that God takes part in human suffering. So, God neither takes away nor gives an explanation or meaning to the suffering of Black people. The emergence of BLM proves that, in the face of the suffering of human beings, empathy must be exercised in the fight for the respect of the dignity of the victims. BLM reminds us that we are to be our brother’s keeper as the Gospel portray because what hurts my brother hurts me as well. After all, we share a common humanity.

Since BLM is a fight led by Black people, its presence portrays that God can use any tool to point to the ongoing injustice in society. Through BLM speech, we learn that God can speak of the injustice according to whatever means He chooses. Does theology pay much attention to listening to the plight of the Black people considering that they have been excluded for centuries and continue to endure the weight of racism which compels them to survive in precarious

²²¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (Princeton, N.J.: Recording for the Blind & Dyslexic, 2006), 346–347.

situations? The White Americans and the Church have been very slow, whether willingly or unwillingly, engage in the discussion about slavery and racism. They have much to learn from the BLM. A Church that closes its doors to address issues of oppression and exclusion cannot convey God's message to all. Yet God reminds all who want to speak in his name to look first and foremost to those for whom nobody cares and who is close to his heart. Therefore, BLM rekindles the hope that the voice of the voiceless must be heard by those who do not want to address the injustice that prevails in American society. BLM is moving the line that what I present in the next section.

Black Lives Matter has Moved the Line

From the famous Zimmerman trial verdict through other unfortunate events until the death of George Floyd, the BLM movement has given structure to citizen reactions to the cases that have shaken the society of the United States. The actions and reactions of BLM have shifted the line in the relation between Black people and White people in the U.S.A. Through their protest marches and consciousness-raising demonstrations throughout the country, BLM has been able to shine a spotlight on the seriousness of the situation of Black people in the U.S., demanding that things change.

For the just cause it defends, BLM has been able to gain the support of thousands of activists and organizations committed to fighting various forms of injustice suffered by Black people and other minorities groups in the U.S. A. and around the world. Their form of engagement has struck a powerful blow in dismantling white supremacy.

Despite some criticism and resistance, the movement has had some remarkable victories that have helped to highlight police brutality and the economic disparity between Black people

and White people in order to implement solutions into policy-making. In an article published in the New York Times by Giovanni Russonello on June 5, 2020, entitled “Why Most Americans Support the Protests”, he says “never before in the history of modern policing has the country expressed such widespread agreement on racism's pervasiveness in policing, and in society at large.”²²² This breadth of awareness of police brutality and systemic racism has had direct impacts on state policymaking.

As a result of BLM's efforts on these issues, criminal justice reform bills have found bipartisan support in Congress. The “ideological armor” of police brutality has been broken.

Breaking the Armor

As absurd as it may sound, police brutality against Black people in the United States has always existed. The reasons for major riots in urban centers are very often related to an abuse of police force. What is changing in the last decade regarding the police brutality is the media means available to spread the fact and invite people to unite people to fight these injustices. Social networks and technological advances have given new resonance to these kinds of events. BLM has combined the two dynamics, protests, and technology, to create a political atmosphere on the national and international scale in which cases of police brutality go less unnoticed. This atmosphere creates socio-political conditions in which the responsibilities of police officers and political institutions are more thoroughly examined. In this struggle to eradicate white supremacy, BLM's presence has generated “citizen pressure” to push for reform of the American justice system.

²²² “Why Most Americans Support the Protests - The New York Times,” accessed March 29, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/05/us/politics/polling-george-floyd-protests-racism.html>.

At the federal level, protesters are calling on Congress to pass the “Justice and Policing Act,”²²³ which is supported by more than 200 mostly Democratic elected officials. It would create a national registry for police officers who commit misconduct, make it easier to prosecute officers and rethink their hiring and training. BLM's tactics have fueled a sense that it can be a game-changer.

A Just Way Forward for Black Person

Considering where Black people come from and what they have been through I simply want to present a summary as a fair path forward for Black People. Far from being a quick fix, these points must be seen as an invitation in the fight for a just society where everyone can be seen and served as equal.

Based on the analyses carried out, my suggestion to overcome the inhumane situation in which Black people live in the United States reads as follows.

1-There is need to learn from history and no matter how hard or shameful it is, avoid nurturing anger or violence or to make it an intense point in one's life but as a means or path to gain wisdom. In this sense, sufferings could become a leitmotif to start from a determined experience—one's own suffering—to reach the Truth—to find meaning in one's life as Victor E. Frankl²²⁴ would say. BLM embodies this principle.

²²³ Karen Bass, “Text - H.R.7120 - 116th Congress (2019-2020): George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2020,” webpage, 2019/2020, last modified July 20, 2020, accessed March 25, 2021, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/7120/text>.

²²⁴ See, Donald F. Tweedie, *Logotherapy and the Christian Faith an Evaluation of Frankl's Existential Approach to Psychotherapy* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1965).

2-Focus on building bridges among human beings. They are chiefly essential support in moments of great hardship. Human beings need organizations in order to promote social change. Individuals cannot improve society alone. BLM is, therefore, a necessary organization for racial justice in the United States and throughout the globe. Not because this organization can provide an immediate solution or kill the devil once and for all. Rather the existence of such an organization is sufficient to prevent the evil of racism to go unchecked. The salvation may reach us through others through a network of relations.

3-Nurture the need to organize. If one's personal organization is already salvific, what about the organization that considers the collective? In the face of tragedies, an organization as the case of BLM can help to see that one is not alone in his struggle. Organizations rooted in love and brotherly care help to overcome injustice and rekindle hope like an inner light which helps to watch over the night of great darkness. BLM is proof.

Each of the above suggestions is closely linked. They form an interdependent whole because no single one is enough for Black people in America to overcome structural racism.

Conclusion

I have sought above all to point out that misfortune does not have the final word on human lives. At the core of the complaint and pain, the desire to live can take its place by opening the way to hope. When everything seems to fall apart, speech and silence come together so that one can become more human, and perhaps draw closer to God as BLM is for Black people. I do not claim to have built up knowledge. I have observed, hopefully, what could be useful for future work on the situation of Black people in the United States. I have learned that it is crucial to let oneself be touched by the suffering of the other to be able to enter into compassion and to act by transforming the reality as BLM does. Experience is a great teacher because it shapes the way we look at reality. In the face of suffering, there is always the possibility of doing something that can give one a new beginning in life.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The transatlantic slave trade and racism are crimes. They are unacceptable. They have stamped the Black people with an inner scar. The ominous recollections of the aberration of slavery kindle up disturbing feelings and shelters the injustice lying beneath racism which has been barred Black people from a life worthy of any humanity. To understand the predicaments of Black people, there is need to glimpse into the transatlantic slave trade and racism in The United States. Between slavery and racism there is a straight link. Through the development of this thesis, I demonstrated that the transatlantic slave-trade and slavery are fundamental to grasp the reality of Black people facing racism in America specially in the United States.

The traces of the transatlantic slave trade have forged the reasoning and social construct between White people and Black people in a world, especially in the United States. Through the racist lenses, Black people have been considered and treated as the dumb beasts. Both, slavery and racism are fundamental to understanding why Black people are “poor” in the United States. They are poor because they have been relegated in subhuman condition in a society structured on racists norms: the white supremacy.

Since Black people are seen and treated as inferior, their inherent dignity has been violated. They have not been considered as children of God. Therefore, the Catholic Teaching of the Church and the notion of ‘preferential option for the poor’ requires that Black people are prioritized in the concerns of the society because of their oppressing history. A call that the movement of Black Lives Matter embodied in its fight to take bring back the humanity of Black people. Black Lives Matter in itself is a sign of hope for all Black people around the world specially in the United States. Hence all Christians are called to do the same since the Gospel and the Catholic Teaching of the Church require that the “poor” deserve a special attention. Black

people continue to be victims of racism at all level in the society of the United States, but I am confidently that the change is coming if all Christians accept to embrace the fight for the dignity of Black people.

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