

# For the Sake of Peace

## Africana Perspectives on Racism, Justice, and Peace in America

*Edited by Charles L. Chavis, Jr.  
and Sixte Vigny Nimuraba*

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## Foreword

I was first introduced to Charles Chavis in August 2012 in Nashville, Tennessee, as a young man from North Carolina seeking to understand the radical traditions of social justice within the black Church in the African Diaspora. We both were entering our first years of divinity school, he pursuing his masters of theological studies and I pursuing my masters of divinity. Throughout our years at Vanderbilt University Divinity School (VDS), and up until today, I have advised and mentored Dr. Chavis—as I like to call him—as he has evolved from young scholar traveling to Ethiopia musing upon the historical and critical theories of the Christian tradition to the historian, practitioner, and truth-teller that he has grown to be. In this book, I see the results of his passion for opening the space for the voices of the African Diaspora in conversations around faith, history, and politics. All too often, the black experience and perspective on issues of racism and peace are filtered through the perspective of white authors and researchers. *For the Sake of Peace* allows the voices of those most impacted by the injustice that is racism to be heard loud and clear.

One of the most impactful moments during our time at VDS came in June 2013, after finishing our first year of seminary. It was at this time that the trial of George Zimmerman was just gearing up, with the selection of six jury members. George Zimmerman, a “self-appointed neighborhood watchman” who, in February 2012, murdered Trayvon Martin, a seventeen-year-old young man, who was walking back from a convenience store in Sanford, Florida. It was the murder of Martin, and the previous murders of other black men and women by police officers since the 2000s, that would produce the most significant civil rights organization of the twenty-first century, black Lives Matter. By July, Zimmerman had been acquitted of all charges by an all-white jury, after admitting that he profiled and followed Martin.

Like all of us, Dr. Chavis was traumatized and angered by the verdict and one day following one of our classes, he asked me a simple question: “Based on your understanding and experiences with anti-black violence in South Africa, what is your perspective on what we are witnessing in the United States?” Indeed, as a human rights activist, I am asked such questions all the time, but after I responded, he proceeded to ask each member of our close group of friends and classmates. As I listened to the responses of members within our group, it was clear that all of us, African Americans, and Africans from the continent, held in our bodies and our psyches the trauma of racist violence. Yet we rarely spoke about how these experiences colored our experiences of the education we were receiving, or our daily experiences in Nashville. Charles’s question opened a floodgate as we shared our anger, our fears, our hopes, and our dreams.

In this vein, *For the Sake of Peace*, first and foremost is a book that values the Africana perspective on racism, justice, and peace in the United States. For far too long, white scholars and practitioners have offered perspectives, analyses, and insights into the struggles of African people throughout the African Diaspora. In the global political moment that we find ourselves, Africana perspectives are necessary for our pursuit of peace and equality.

*For the Sake of Peace* is more than a collection of chapters written by scholars and practitioners, both young and old; it upends the patterns within the academy that have perpetuated racism domestically and colonialism abroad—a system that has conditioned students and faculty alike into devaluing black perspectives and the lived experiences that shape such perspectives.

Rev. Canon Nontombi Naomi Tutu  
Cape Town, South Africa  
November 2019

# Acknowledgments

This book took shape during a May 2018 workshop on building an architecture for peace in the United States at the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution Retreat Center, Point of View. This workshop provided a forum for researchers and practitioners from conflict analysis, conflict resolution, and the peacebuilding community. As participants in this meeting, we recognized the importance of vital and often-ignored peace-centered perspectives of marginalized voices explicitly against injustice and racism, from throughout the African Diaspora.

We are grateful for the encouragement and support of Douglas Irvin-Erickson, director of the Genocide Prevention Program and assistant professor at our home institution, the School of Conflict Analysis and Resolution, George Mason University. For this volume, we are indebted to all the authors for their dedication of time and energy and their essential contributions.

The volume could not have been completed without the support of Chip Hauss, senior fellow for Innovation, Alliance for Peacebuilding, and visiting scholar at the School of Conflict Analysis and Resolution, George Mason University.

We benefited significantly from the work of Oluwagbemiga Dasyilva, editorial assistant and program coordinator for the John Mitchell Jr. Program for History, Justice, and Race. Last, we are particularly grateful to Dhara Snowden, senior editor of politics, international relations, and security studies for Rowman & Littlefield, for her continued support at every phase of this project.



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# Introduction

## *The Demands of Peace*

Charles L. Chavis, Jr.

Courageous people do not fear forgiving, for the sake of peace.

—Nelson Mandela

In 1994, four years following his release from jail, President Nelson Mandela was interviewed by Anthony Sampson of *The Guardian*. It was in this interview that he would speak the words that would land upon the pages of this book. In his article, “The Evil Must Be Forgiven, Not Forgotten,” Sampson recounted his interview with the late South African president reporting on South Africa’s first democratic election where he asked him whether he had not been “forgiving too readily.” Mandela replied with an emphatic “no.” “Courageous people do not fear forgiving, for the sake of peace.”<sup>1</sup> In the shadow of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), Sampson, like many, had problems squaring the historical and present injustices of Apartheid with the call for reconciliation and peace. He articulates such, writing, “The reconciliation which Mandela demands is a priceless national asset, but the sins of apartheid cannot be wished away.”<sup>2</sup>

Sampson’s perspective represents an understanding of peace and forgiveness that assumes that those who evoke such terms are not concerned with justice and racial equity and that there is a wish for such injustices to “be wished away.”<sup>3</sup>

This book centers on an understanding of peace that is concerned with justice and racial equity; more specifically, it centers on what peace in the United States requires. Peace requires culturally inclusive education, access to health care, and clean water. Peace calls for an end to systemic institutionalized racial terror designed to control the black body socially. Peace demands that history be revisited that we may recover the purposefully omitted and silent narratives of many black women and student leaders in the

black Freedom Struggle. Peace calls for us to study the intersections of white supremacy and political opportunism.

This book centers on these demands for peace, examining racism and injustice in the United States through the eyes of those of African descent. Historically America has promoted itself as the moral police promoting democracy across the globe, offering her perspectives and ideas to combat poverty and racial and ethnic violence. In the age of President Donald J. Trump, there has been a resurgence of racial and political violence in the United States, specifically as it relates to the treatment of ethnic minorities. The rise of overt political racism and intolerance has made visible, for a global audience for the first time since the Civil Rights movement, the deeply rooted systems of discrimination and identity-based conflicts in the United States that give rise to structural and direct violence.

African Americans, like other minorities, find themselves in a unique position in this age as new forms of race lynching continue to go unchecked; voting rights continue to be suppressed; prisons continue to serve as a mechanism for disenfranchising minorities and the poor (with more minorities being imprisoned in America than in South Africa at the height of Apartheid); and systems of structural violence continue to persist. The mantra “Make America Great Again,” a racist dog whistle, calls up memories of a “Great” time where white Americans felt more secure socially and politically.<sup>4</sup> African Americans who lived alongside their white brothers and sisters are in search of such a time when America was indeed “Great”—when schools were separate but equal, when racial violence was not commonplace, and when parks and coffee shops were not segregated.

In this “post-truth” society, discussions of racial equality and identity politics often shape the news and agendas in the United States. While many works examine how Americans examine the social, economic, and political struggles that African Americans face, no current work considers the peace-centered perspectives of marginalized voices explicitly on these struggles, from throughout the African Diaspora. This book brings together scholars from across the globe to reflect upon violence, conflict, and the possibility for peace in the United States. This scope of the contributing authors is intended to (1) invert the theoretical framing prevalent in most peace and conflict scholarship, where American or Euro-Western scholars treat the historical and contemporary violence and conflicts of non-Euro-Western societies as scientific case studies; (2) introduce to peace and conflict studies a wide range of new theoretical and philosophical approaches to conflict, violence, and peace from African Diaspora communities around the world, using the United States as a case study; and (3) deepen our scholarship on the United States in the field of peace and conflict studies.

We hope that these perspectives will offer invaluable insight into the many problems that African Americans have historically and continue to face and

will assist in laying the foundation for peacebuilding in America. This book is structured in three significant sectors that center around the “demands of peace”: “Racism: A Systemic Thing” (part I), “Knowing the Past: Narrative Change and the Historical Perspective” (part II), and “Africana Cultural and Religious Perspectives on Peace” (part III).

## PART I: RACISM: A SYSTEMIC THING

When now we turn and look five miles above, there on the edge of town are five houses of prostitutes,—two of blacks and three of whites; and in one of the houses of the whites a worthless black boy was harbored too openly two years ago; so he was hanged for rape. And here, too, is the high whitewashed fence of the “stockade,” as the county prison is called; the white folks say it is ever full of black criminals,—the black folks say that only colored boys are sent to jail, and they not because they are guilty, but because the State needs criminals to eke out its income by their forced labor.

—Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*<sup>5</sup>

More than 115 years ago, W. E. B. Du Bois articulated what Michelle Alexander would name as the New Jim Crow, highlighting the nature of systemic racism within the U.S. Prison System. It is out of the lived experiences of those of African descent, who witnessed and experienced individual, institutional, and structural forms of racism, that several theories about race have emerged. Systemic racism is among such theories, and Du Bois is one of the several scholars from throughout the African Diaspora who would shape our contemporary understanding of the term. Other notable scholars include Patricia Hill Collins, Anna Julia Cooper, Frederick Douglass, and Franz Fanon, among others. Influenced by the work of such scholars, the theory was formally introduced by sociologist Joe Feagin. In *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparations*, Feagin proposes that Systemic racism includes the complex array of antiblack practices, the unjustly gained political-economic power of whites, the continuing economic and other resource inequalities along racial lines, and the white racist ideologies and attitudes created to maintain and rationalize white privilege and power. Systemic here means that the core racist realities are manifested in each of society’s major parts . . . each major part of U.S. society—the economy, politics, education, religion, the family—reflects the fundamental reality of systemic racism.<sup>6</sup>

The chapters in part I, “Racism: A Systemic Thing,” focus on the impacts of and responses to systemic racism represented within what Feagin names as its “major parts,” including politics, education, and the criminal justice system, made manifest in the modern-day forms of racial terror lynching—the

murder of unarmed black men and women at the hands of law enforcement and the rise of radical white domestic terrorism resulting in the murder of innocent black worshippers in Charleston, South Carolina.

In chapter 1, “Structural Violence through the Lenses of Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation: A Comparative Case Study of America–South Africa Racial Politics,” Siyabulela Mandela comparatively examines the advent and evolution of race-based structural and direct violence against South Africa and the United States. Mandela highlights the persistent imaginings of exceptionalism in South Africa and the United States.

In chapter 2, “Deconstructing the Origin and Myth of black Criminality: Asserting black Agency over black Lives and black Communities,” Wayne Rose briefly examines the historical causes of black crimes from the perspective of W. E. B. Du Bois, one of America’s leading sociologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as some of the contemporary issues of policing black communities. In addition, this chapter will also analyze the use, role, and importance of cultural socialization as a deterrent of black agency and suggest community initiatives for potential contemporary solutions.

In chapter 3, “The Systemic Lynching of Trevyan Devon Rowe,” Robert K. Hoggard sheds light on the systemic failures of the Rochester City School District, leading to the death of Trevyan Rowe, a fourteen-year-old African American boy with autism. In examining these systemic failures Hoggard points to what he names as “tenets of rational-legal bureaucracy,” a social tool that he argues is oppressive and in many ways dehumanizing as it denies people closest to the problem, teachers, social workers, and counselors, with the resources needed to support the students within urban school districts.

## **PART II: KNOWING THE PAST: NARRATIVE CHANGE AND THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Brett Davidson argues that “narrative change work rests on the premise that reality is socially constructed through narrative, and that to bring about change in the world we need to pay attention to how this takes place.”<sup>7</sup> Over the past few years, “narrative change” has been a buzzword that has been used and overused by practitioners and scholars alike. In spite of the evoking of the word, there have been very few scholars who have attempted to provide working definitions of narrative change, with Davidson being among the select few.<sup>8</sup>

Gail Christopher’s Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation (TRHT) framework provides a useful guideline for communities who seek to move from narrative change to transformation. Like several U.S.–based TRC models, Christopher leans on the existing foundations laid out by South

Africa's TRC, in addition to the American-themed TRC's that emerged as a result of the rise in racial tension throughout the United States. One distinct difference between the traditional model and Christopher's adaptation is how she approaches both truth and the specific focus on what she defines as "racial healing" rather than reconciliation.

Christopher presents "narrative change" as the first element of the TRHT framework, where the central goal is to "to create a more complete and accurate narrative that will help people understand how racial hierarchy has been embedded in our society."<sup>9</sup> This approach is to be implemented through all media, including "literature, museum exhibits, parks, places of worship, schools, magazines, newspapers, music, art, theater, television shows, movies, radio programs, games, and social media."<sup>10</sup>

Among the more prominent activist adamant in calling for narrative change are leaders such as Bryan Stevenson, who argues that "we are talking about history because we have to change the narrative."<sup>11</sup> Like Stevenson, Christopher's approach to narrative change is rooted in understanding the power of history as a tool. She makes this clear as she places this understanding at the foundation of her guiding principles for racial healing writing.

There must be an accurate recounting of history, both local and national . . . our history has been written largely by the dominant groups in our society and in our communities in order to serve their particular interests. Negative or embarrassing events, particularly those involving the oppression of non-dominant groups, have too often been suppressed or conveniently forgotten in the retelling of history.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, Christopher argues that understanding both dominant and nondominant narratives is the first step to approaching narrative change, specifically within local communities. As it relates to moving beyond narrative change, Christopher focuses on racial healing rather than racial reconciliation or justice with the hopes that the narratives will "foster empathy and connections that allow us to see ourselves in each other and thereby help to eliminate the emotional separation between communities."<sup>13</sup> Throughout each section, several authors employ historical consciousness suggesting that a historical understanding of racism, white supremacy, and injustice can inform our present-day understandings of racism and white supremacy within American society.

The chapters in part II provide historical surveying, an evaluation of the present, and reflections for understanding how historical understandings of past injustices and Civil Rights activism can inform our approaches to peacebuilding in the future. From black Lives Matter to the Fight for Reparations, some of the most important events and movements in recent memory are placed within the historical context within these pages, in addition to the programs and strategies that aided in shaping the black Freedom Struggle in the United States.

In addition, part II provides the basis for the critical insights and historical perspectives that are essential for an understanding of the central issues of race and racism, through the lens of internal and external problems in race relations, both in the past and in the current moment. These topics include white supremacy in American politics, racial disparities within the healthcare system, the silencing of the narratives of African American women and students from Historically black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) (outside of the Deep South) in the history of the black freedom struggle, all of which are discussed at length by historians, anthropologist, and psychologist.

The authors in part II of this volume, “Knowing the Past: Narrative Change and the Historical Perspective.” In chapter 4, “Segregation, White Supremacy, and the Dangers of Political Opportunism in the United States and South Africa: A Case Study of George Wallace and Hendrik Verwoerd,” Matthew Washington uses the experiences of George Wallace and Hendrik Verwoerd as a comparative historical case study to examine the advent and evolution of the politics of white supremacy in the United States and South Africa during the 1950s and 1960s. In shedding light on these historical understandings, practitioners and activists can more effectively combat modern forms of white supremacy in American politics.

In chapter 5, “‘I Leave You a Desire to Live Harmoniously’: Mary McLeod Bethune on Health and Wellness,” Ida Jones examines the intricacies of race, gender, class, and callousness visited upon eighteen-year-old Bernice Mills who was barred from Methodist-maintained Sibley Hospital in Washington, DC, in December 1944, which drew Bethune and notable African American Christian leadership into a fight documented on the pages of the Afro newspaper. Even with Mrs. Bethune’s crusade for Mills and adequate health care, the legacy of racial violence in the area of medicine continues into the twenty-first century with a redefinition of opioid use and misuse. African Americans suffering from sickle cell anemia or osteological complications from HIV are denied adequate doses of pain medication because of discriminatory ideas that African Americans do not “feel” pain as intensely as other racial groups, as well as being predisposed to opioid abuse resulting in addiction or illegal resale. In the end, Jones explores the question, is healthcare a fundamental human right or elite corporate privilege in America?

In chapter 6, “From Birmingham to Monrovia: black Women and the Wait/Weight of Freedom, 1960–2005,” Ajanet Rountree seeks to recover the purposefully omitted narratives of women, more specifically black women, from discourse and scholarship about the struggle for civil and human rights in Birmingham, Alabama, during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and the Mass Action for Peace Movement in Monrovia, Liberia, from 2003 to 2005. It is within both social movements, Rountree argues, that black women emerged as leaders. Rountree examines the intricacies of the leadership of black

women within these movements, shedding light on the essential role of black women in contemporary social justice movements within the United States.

In chapter 7, “‘So Tried, So True’: The Legacy of Student-Led Protests at Historically black Colleges and Universities,” Simone Barrett presents a brief study of student-led activism during the black Freedom Struggle in the United States. Within this chapter, Barrett argues that these student activists aided in restructuring the political, social, and economic landscape of the United States. Focusing on Maryland, Barrett examines how social justice activism of HBCU students during the Civil Rights movement can inform our understanding of the more recent social justice movements of the twenty-first century.

In chapter 8, “Reparations and Reparations NOW!: A Brief History of Compensatory Justice for the European Enslavement of Africans,” Raymond Winbush will provide a brief history of these discussions and why reparations for the enslavement of Africans remain a primary goal for the global African community. This chapter explores the five historical stages of the global reparations struggle. It will also present a realistic view of the current battle for compensatory justice for the global African community, including its strengths and weaknesses. Finally, it discusses the Grassroots organizers, Legislators, Attorneys, Scholars, and Students Model, a strategy that can lead to successfully obtaining justice for the descendants of Africans impacted by enslavement. It will show what groups are essential in receiving a sentence for enslavement and its continuing impact on Africans around the world.

### PART III: AFRICANA CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES ON PEACE

Since I have not broken the ties that bind me to underclass poor black community, I have seen that knowledge, especially that which enhances daily life and strengthens our capacity to survive, can be shared. It means that critics, writers, academics have to give the same critical attention to nurturing and cultivating our ties to black communities that we give to writing articles, teaching, and lecturing.

—bell hooks, *Postmodern Blackness*<sup>14</sup>

Within her classic chapter, hooks is responding to the suggestion by Cornel West in his chapter, “Postmodernism and black America,” that black intellectuals “are marginal—usually languishing at the interface of black and white cultures or thoroughly ensconced in Euro-American settings.”<sup>15</sup> Indeed, as hooks notes, there is some validity within West assessment, arguing that there must be a commitment to bridging the chasm between black intellectuals and black communities throughout the African Diaspora.

In his seminal work, *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Chapter on African American Religious and Cultural Criticism*, Victor Anderson commends hooks's calls for "'postmodern Blackness' . . . [which] recognizes that black identities are continually being reconstituted as African Americans inhabit widely differentiated social spaces and communities of moral discourse."<sup>16</sup> The works of hooks, West, and Anderson, represent a larger field centering around Africana, cultural, religious and humanistic thought, practice, and criticism. A field that has largely been absent from the field of peace and conflict analysis.

The chapters in part III, "Africana Cultural and Religious Perspectives on Peace," give voice to the work of scholars whose works fall within this relevant field. These works complicate and challenge our traditional understandings of racism, justice, and peace in the United States. From the education system to racial reconciliation, these chapters offer prescriptive and analytical perspectives dealing with understanding injustice within the United States. Unlike other works, these authors apply both religious and humanistic approaches to understanding the threat of racism within the pursuit of peace. In addition, part III offers provocative perspectives on the role of ritual and remembrance in the black Freedom Struggle within the United States.

The authors in part III of this volume, Civil Rights, white Supremacy, and the Pursuit of Freedom. In chapter 9, "Sowing Solidarity through Womanist Erotic Pedagogy," Courtney Bryant examines the broad scope of the liberative impact of embodied learning as a tool of conscientization. Using the scholarship of phenomenologists Howard Harrod and Robert Sokolowski, sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois, and womanist Lynn Westfield, Bryant-Prince argues that ritual racial remembrance projects rooted in embodied pedagogy, defined as projects that reflect on the United States' past racial traumas, create opportunities for interracial erotic engagement—that is intimacies fomented by the practice of creating and offer not only experiences that conscientize students, but allow them an experience of "life together." These experiences, she argues, foster mutuality, making the transformation possible, moving students of the dominant culture from a position of the oppressor to friend, a transformation achieved only through proximity—drawing one another close as one would a brother or sister.

Chapter 10, "Race Conflicts, Rituals of Dissent, and Blackness in America," Oluwagbemiga Dasylyva argues that the African American culture is unique as a result of an experience-based evolution that responded to the needs of its time. He suggests that African Americans have been locked in this phase of pain with little or no hope of its ending without recourse to dissent and protests. Consequently, the narratives of 'survival' for African Americans, however, riddled with pain, is, therefore, an ever-unfolding episode. Lastly, Dasylyva suggests that this culture that cuts across protests, music, and religion to mention a few is not a hybrid form of the African

culture nor is it related to the culture that legitimizes slavery. It is a different and independent system that sets itself apart from the two worlds.

In chapter 11, “For Renewal: Faith in the Fight for Dignity and Human Rights,” Sandra Tombe reflects on the work of a faith-based Washington, DC, organization whose mission is to serve underprivileged communities—youth and families—and build bridges across races. Her reflections on the work of this organization show, as did the abolition of slavery in the United States, that drastic policy changes that seek to promote human rights can be ineffective if they are not accompanied by renewal in people. What this organization highlights is that changing hearts remain an integral part of the fight for human rights and the dignity of all people. In the end, this chapter looks at racial reconciliation as a mechanism for the promotion of human rights and peacebuilding within the United States.

In chapter 12, “Carcasses of Memory: Intersectionality, Institutionalized Terrorism, and the Play on black Bodies in America,” David Olali interrogates the meaning of what is meant by peace and security in America. This chapter engages the function of sociocultural implications of “For the Sake of Peace” within the political atmosphere that permits racism, injustice, and a lack of peace to thrive in African American communities.

## NOTES

1. Anthony Sampson, “The Evil Must Be Forgiven, Not Forgotten,” *Guardian*, April 30, 1994, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/1994/may/01/nelsonmandela.southafrica>.

2. Ibid.

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4. CNN, Andrew Kaczynski, “Trump Was Saying ‘Make America Great Again’ Long before He Claims He Thought It Up,” accessed November 23, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/01/18/politics/kfile-trump-maga-origins/index.html>.

5. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1904), 125.

6. Joe R. Feagin, *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparations* (New York: Routledge, 2010), xiv.

7. Brett Davidson, “The Role of Narrative Change in Influencing Policy,” *African Scholars for Knowledge Justice (ASK Justice)*, <http://askjustice.org/2016/06/04/the-role-of-narrative-change-in-influencing-policy>.

8. For an authoritative approach to narrative and conflict resolution from the field of peace and conflict studies, see Sara Cobb, *Speaking of Violence* (Cambridge, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013). Excellent work in narrative studies regarding racial conflict in the United States includes James J. Donahue, Jennifer Ann Ho, and Shaun Morgan, *Narrative, Race, and Ethnicity in the United States* (Columbus: Ohio State

University Press, 2017) and Lee Anne Bell, *Storytelling for Social Justice: Connecting Narrative and the Arts in Antiracist Teaching* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

9. Gail Christopher, "Racial Equity Resource Guide," in *Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation Implementation Guidebook* (Battle Creek, MI: W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 2016), 16.

10. Ibid.

11. Bryan Stevenson, "Changing America's Racial Narrative," *YouTube video*, 3:26, August 5, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jzPUMQfo3B8>.

12. Gail C. Christopher, "The Time for Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation Is Now," *Liberal Education* 102, no. 4 (fall 2016), <https://www.aacu.org/liberaleducation/2016/fall/christopher>.

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14. bell hooks, "Postmodern Blackness," *Postmodern Culture* 1, no. 1 (1990): 14.

15. Ibid.

16. Victor Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Essay on African American Religious and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1999), 11.