

The Struggles of African Americans and the ‘Inspiration View’ and ‘Opium View’ of the Black Faith

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ABSTRACT

This article will examine how the Black Church and Black Faith influence the political and social activism of African-Americans, how important their influence and role is in promoting and spreading, and how the “Opium View” and the “Inspiration View”, which are contradictory, influence the argument and activism movement, and will analyze its foundations and effects.

Keywords: *African Americans, Political Activism, Racism, Black Churches, Opium and Inspiration views.*

ÖZ

Bu makale, Siyahi Kilise ve Siyahi inancının Afro-Amerikalıların siyasi ve sosyal aktivizmini nasıl etkilediğini, etki ve rollerinin teşvik etme ve yaymada ne kadar önemli olduğunu, bu konudaki birbiri ile çelişen “Afyon Görüşü” ve “İlham Görüşü”nün tartışmaları ve aktivizm hareketini nasıl etkilediğini inceleyecek ve bunun temellerini ve etkilerini analiz edecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Afrikan Amerikalılar, Siyasi Aktivizm, Irkçılık, Siyahi Kiliseler, Afyon ve İlham Görüşü*

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INTRODUCTION

The word 'black' has been used in western and eastern societies since the beginning of human history on earth. In this regard, it would not be correct to attribute the origin of this word only to white-skinned westerners. We see that people in the east also use this word to separate and classify themselves. However, the concept of black has had many different uses. Although today the use of the word black brings to mind African Americans or Africans, in the past the word black was not used only for these communities. People, especially people with white or yellow skin color, used the word black for them when describing people who are darker than they are.

I am black, but comely, O you daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon. Look not on me, because I am black, because the sun has looked on me: my mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but my own vineyard have I not kept. (Solomon, 1991, p. 789)

It is known that other nations and cultures use the word 'black' differently and the person they address varies. In addition, the use of the word 'black' three thousand or four thousand years ago and its use in later years may differ enormously. This shows us that the structure and meaning of this word has changed. Although the current perception is that their skin color is a darker skin tone than people in Africa, in the past the word was used in the United Kingdom for people who were not from their home country, born outside the European continent, and had a darker complexion than their own. For this reason, some researchers and people who study on races experienced conflict and disagreement between each other, because according to some, the old use of this word was used for brown skin or indeed today's auburn or wheat skinned people. With the change of this perception, the word black began to be used mostly for people living in Africa.

After the people in Africa were taken as slaves in many European, Middle Eastern and some far Eastern countries, the perception of Black began to change considerably. This word, which was once used only to distinguish skin color, has now been used as a derogatory word due to their low status as slaves. Although the words 'Negro and Niger', which are of Latin origin, originally meant black, the use of these words has often begun to be used in the sense of humiliation and insult. Especially for black people who were taken as slaves or migrated from Africa to America, this word was used in an extremely humiliating, disparaging and bad sense.

Whites in the novels often use the “n-word” to express anger about a situation.

Frederick Douglass says that the “watch-words” of proponents of slavery were “Damn the Abolitionists!” and “Damn the Niggers!” (134) This anger wasn’t an example of hating slaves solely to hate slaves, though. Slaveholders were dependent on slave labor, so their anger was fed by the fragility of their livelihoods. (Cherry, 2010, p. 48).

In the United States, the use of the term Afro-American has had a universal adherence. In particular, according to the cultural and social perception of the United States, the racial classification of African Americans is made for African countries located below the Sahara Desert, in other words, sub-Saharan for short. Although the ancestry and roots of the Black people are largely rooted in this region, African Americans living in the United States are also rooted in this region, while the majority of blacks living today who are citizens of the United States are descended from their once-slave ancestors. These people had to submit to the slavery system due to the absence of any political union or community during the pre-civil war years of slavery, and on top of that, they tried to endure humiliation because of all these skin colors. While in Africa, this community, which was able to live a free life by living their own culture and their own belief systems freely and strongly, in unity, has undergone great changes over the years. Although the roots and ancestors of the blacks who were taken to America as slaves or migrated to the Americas brought the religions of their tribes to the fore, the disciples and apostles of Jesus had also adopted Christianity for a while after their evangelism studies in Africa. Before and after the great division of the church, some groups managed to remain Orthodox, but after a while, the influence of Christianity in Africa was almost gone during the sect created by the German ex-Catholic priest Martin Luther. Therefore, most of the religions of the slaves who were taken to America or those who migrated to that continent were pagan and they were subjected to a compulsory conversion process.

Because the majority of Africans were brought to America as slaves, they were not given white rights and were subjected to worse living and working conditions. Although white people were very well united in terms of human rights, justice and democracy, black people were prevented from uniting, but there was no basis for such a thing. In America, which is seen as the land of opportunities, these people brought from Africa were subjected to great cruelty and humiliation. White “slave masters” who introduced themselves as so-called good Christians pressured and forced black African Americans to adopt the Christian faith, as well as the black African Americans they worked with without the slightest

sense of mercy. Although there were African Americans among them who had previously converted to Christianity, the vast majority were pagan. Because the African Americans at the time did not have any consciousness of seeking rights, they accepted everything their masters said, and most blacks accepted this belief as if they were experiencing a Stockholm Syndrome.

After the civil war, the army led by Abraham Lincoln defeated the Confederate League, Lincoln officially abolished slavery and began to ensure that blacks lived, organized, and united under equal rights and conditions of life. After the abolition of slavery and the blacks' relief, they gradually created their own communities and the accompanying social rules, cultures, values and moral codes with the cultures of their former slave ancestors. This culture was never to be underestimated or belittled. Their ancestors had a great influence on the culture that the blacks created after slavery. As Gates put it;

Elizabeth [Alexander] is right, of course. It's a stirring fact that our slave ancestors left behind not documents of property but an incredible amount of cultural wealth. It is a tragedy that we are only able to imagine their individual contributions to that collective wealth- and the worlds they might have made had they been free. (Gates, 2010, p. 156).

Initially, these communities had little political or global or broad national influence, but although they still could not make their voices heard, their conditions were much better than before, and they were trying to gain identity and stay together through kendo communities. The first of these is the church due to the conditions of the period. The church was the only thing holding black people together, and it was starting to become a good institution to defend their rights. "The African American's relationship to Africa has long been ambivalent, at least since the early nineteenth century, when 3,000 black men crowded into Bishop Richard Allen's African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia to protest noisily a plan to recolonize free blacks in Africa." (Gates, 2001, p. 72).

Although the majority of America is of Puritan descent and is briefly Protestant, there are also people of the Catholic and Western Orthodox faith in the country. After blacks began to see themselves as Americans after slavery, they continued to pursue the protestant sect without showing any protest or opposition to faith. The most comprehensive church that has become the center of African Americans has been the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church and the Baptist churches, which are the centers of Christian beliefs from the times of slavery. Over the years, their organization increased even more, and when the history came to the mid-1900s, political movements increased.

Especially after the emergence of Baptist Pastor Martin Luther King, the political and political side of the church began to come to the fore.

The great struggle that Martin Luther King started made a lot of noise and had a huge impact. Luther effectively supported the Christian part of black people and sought to help and lead them. Although this situation seems to be a great advantage for blacks, blacks were no longer ineffective in politics as they were in the post-slavery period, and they established their political parties out of compulsory requirements, as well as the pursuit of political rights, and they are struggling. Political parties such as the Black Panthers followed a Marxist and Leninist policy and preferred to stay away from religion, that is, the church, but this does not mean that they are not united. Some of the friction that arose when Blacks were most needed to come together have plunged the Black Church and Black political parties into a conflict. While some people believe that the church has a gathering and unifying power and that it is 'inspiring', which Martin Luther King has a great share in, some groups, on the other hand, have Marxist-Leninist ideas or people who do not care about faith, have stated that people in the church believe in imaginary, empty, meaningless, unrealistic things and actually become numb about their political rights and put them in the background, and they see religion as 'opium'. This article will address the issue of the distinction between these two different views, Opiate point of view and Inspiration idea.

THE STRUGGLES OF AFRICAN AMERICANS AND THE 'INSPIRATION VIEW' AND 'OPIUM VIEW' OF THE BLACK FAITH

There have been many arguing that the continued unity of the church played a major role in the rise of political resistance and protest brought about by rising racism in America. Many pastors and preachers who preached in the church now spoke to the audience and the congregation, instead of a biblical subject, their preaching that their Lord Jesus treated everyone equally, forbids nationalism and racism, God loves everyone without discrimination, with political stances and anti-racism. While the Roman Catholic Churches or the Orthodox churches did not exhibit this attitude, this was the constant preaching of the Protestant churches and all black or predominantly black churches. In fact, instead of a place of worship, the church had become a place and a residence for people to gather and unite, to seek rights and protest with the support of preachers.

Of course, there were also biblical topics, but there are many writers and thinkers who think that God forbids racism and that the church wants to raise people's awareness by saying that it is a sin. This influence expanded and grew as famous and highly influential preachers such as Martin Luther King began to emerge. It was such an effect that King's influence did not only include black people, but also helped white-conscious people to support King. This was really incredible

because it seems that when black people actually unite, they gradually begin to feel that they are not alone. Although the support of white people was not in the church, there were quite a few people who were active outside as well. But the speeches of preachers like Luther King in the church caused a social and far-reaching impact and impact. King's speeches sounded more like a speech by a political party or a human rights fighter than by a clergyman. "Unity has never meant uniformity." (King Jr, 2000, p. 64). As King stated, we see that he is also trying to bring black people together. Contrary to the skepticism of some people, King, who believed that there would not be the slightest bad thing about believing blacks or black people in general, argued that the benefits of the church were too much.

When we look at modern man, we have to face the fact...that modern man suffers from a kind of poverty of the spirit, which stands in glaring contrast to his scientific and technological abundance; We've learned to fly the air like birds, we've learned to swim the seas like fish, and yet we haven't learned to walk the Earth as brothers and sisters... (Kerber, 2007).

A sizable crowd attended this sermon that King gave in San Francisco, and as we understood from King's sermon, he argued that what people need is to unite, and once again, the church has a great influence on this, and the church as well as blacks everywhere. He stated that he needed to stand in between, that the church was a good place for that, and that the church would be a very effective place for black people to seek their rights. Trying to show the positive results of black people standing together in the church, King also continued his work. In his sermons and speeches, he always maintained the negative consequences of discrimination against black people, the gaining of black people's self-identity, the unification in the church and the declaration that with God's help they will overcome this discrimination. Especially experts and scholars in the 1960s agreed on this inspiration.

Luther's actions, social and progressive activism, and the pursuit of rights had positive results on them. James Cone, the founder of Black Liberation Theology, one of the most important and one of the first to do this work, has a great influence on the fact that the church is together, claimed that Luther's attitude and political situation, the unification of black people in the church under one roof is extremely 'inspiring' and has a great influence on blacks' awareness. "I do think there must be centralized leadership in the sense that, say, in our struggle all of the leaders coordinate their efforts, cooperate and, and at least evince a degree of unity." (King Jr, 1964, p. 56) When we look at Luther's interview, he argued against racism and for black people to have their own political rights and not to

be discriminated against, so that the church should be united and there should be a leader. Considering that there are some people who support this view other than religious officials, we see many people who find the ‘Inspiration view’ useful and support it.

As a priest, of course, Luther also referred to God in his subjects and preached that God is against discrimination and that racism is a sin. Religious people among blacks sought their rights through ‘inspiration’ through these sermons and God’s promises, and raised their voices by being influenced by them. But not every black person had a religious belief or there were black individuals with different beliefs. Although they were of different religions or beliefs, they did not have any complaints or mutterings due to this attitude of the church. There have been many blacks and leaders arguing that this ‘inspiration view’ could be an effective way for people to seek their rights and to persuade people who are already Christians across the country. The fact that most of the country is Christian has created a mild atmosphere with this ‘inspiration view’.

The cross can heal and hurt; it can be empowering and liberating but also enslaving and oppressive. There is no one way in which the cross can be interpreted. I offer my reflections because I believe that the cross placed alongside the lynching tree can help us to see Jesus in America in a new light, and thereby empower people who claim to follow him to take a stand against white supremacy and every kind of injustice. (Cone, 2011, p. xix).

In Cone’s opinion, the influence of the church and the influence given by Christian messages will be beneficial and effective for the whole society. Cone felt that ‘inspiration view would be a very unique and most effective way for all blacks, and that it was the best way to bring people together. These people, who thought that the ‘inspiration view’ was the most effective and strongest way for blacks to seek their rights, argued that when blacks listened to sermons under the same roof and with messages from a ‘divine’ power, their understanding and selfidentities would come out more clearly and they encouraged the church to seek political rights and besides, they saw the church as the most authoritative and effective institution.

Unfortunately, during the course of 2,000 years of Christian history, this symbol of salvation has been detached from any reference to the ongoing suffering and oppression of human beings—those whom Ignacio Ellacuría, the Salvadoran martyr, called “the crucified peoples of history.” The cross has been transformed into a harmless, non-offensive ornament that Christians wear around their necks. Rather than reminding us of the “cost of discipleship,” it has become

a form of “cheap grace,” an easy way to salvation that doesn’t force us to confront the power of Christ’s message and mission. Until we can see the cross and the lynching tree together, until we can identify Christ with a “recrucified” black body hanging from a lynching tree, there can be no genuine understanding of Christian identity in America, and no deliverance from the brutal legacy of slavery and white supremacy. (Cone, 2011, p. xiv).

Cone once again clearly emphasizes the importance of the community brought by the Christian faith, ‘ecclesia’, in other words the church. He has been influential in mobilizing and encouraging black Christians of faith and seeking their political rights through religious discourse. Declaring that the crucifixion of Jesus was not only for white people, but also for black people, He died on the cross and was resurrected on the third day, and invited people under the church to protest against this racist system, imperialist and capitalist order in the United States of America.

Another view, the ‘Opiate view’, emerged contrary to all this ‘Inspiration view’, purified itself from all religious and divine beliefs, and is the most effective way of seeking rights and fighting against the racist order. It is an opinion that is defended and believed to be achieved through rights groups, democratic means, armed or unarmed actions. And the number of those who believe in this view is substantial and effective. The basis of the view is based on Marxism and Communism. The influence of Leninism is also considerable, but the citizens of the United States, who hesitate to adopt the Leninist ideology, have become quite inclined towards Marxism and Socialist thought. The minority struggles that blacks have seen in other countries, especially the democratic or armed struggles of left groups and left parties, have been an encouraging inspiration. “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.”(Marx, 1927, p. 3) In this idea put forward by Marx, it is clearly seen that his view of religion is negative, implying that religion numbs people, prevents them from thinking, is useless in the pursuit of any human rights or any minority rights, it is just deception, lies and poison.

The way advocated by those protesting racism in the United States with this statement, which is their main motto in the search for political rights and which supports this view put forward by Marx, was that black individuals would get their rights through political and philosophical views, not through the church, religion or clergy. Particularly, the political parties formed by blacks that emerged in the 1960s, like the Black Panthers, claimed that black people gathered in churches were doing wrong, that religions that were fairy tales or deceptions

in their opinion poisoned people in the church, dulled their thoughts, and were dysfunctional in the movement against racism. This view was first put forward by Edward Franklin Frazier in 1963 on behalf of black people. The author has argued that black churches, in particular, blunt awareness of education, science, and human rights, and that the clergy's sermons on God's narrative and life after death, contrary to people's awareness, are delusional. "Educational institutes can no longer be prizes in church politics or furnish berths for failure in other walks of life." (Frazier, 1974, p. 220) According to Frazier's views, the union under the church or religion does not play a role in the development of the human mind or ideas, but rather dulls it.

One of the biggest reasons for this view to be defended is that after the assassination of Luther, black Christians became passive in the movement against racism. The same is true for black Muslims after the assassination of Malcolm X. "Attending church does not necessarily mean living the principles taught in those meeting. You can be active in a church but inactive in its gospel." (Covey, 2004, p. 125) According to Covey's thoughts, there is no need to renounce any feature by not going to church, the activity does not disappear suddenly, black people can claim their rights and show their reactions if they stand together outside the church.

There are many scholars who claim that black people lost their active role because they always acted with the motto "Jesus loves you" in the church and remained passive while seeking their rights, keeping this motto in mind, especially because of the assassination of religious officials or the withdrawal of these clergymen, and because they remained like a herd of sheep without a shepherd. There are many black people who argue that the clergy, who constantly talk about words of love and advise them to move in this direction, have bad intentions and that these discourses do not work; "The Negro does not want love. He wants justice . . . I believe it would be better for the Negro's soul to be seared with hate than dwarfed by self-abasement." (Frazier, 1974, p. 17)

Many black writers have tried to articulate this opium view because for them the Christian faith did not protect, defend, or exalt any rights of blacks. Many scholars and writers should have sought the rights of black people with political awareness, not a belief that 'poisoned' them. To them, the Bible and the church were a useless book that insulted blacks;

I realized that the Bible had been written by white men. I knew that, according to many Christians, I was a descendant of Ham, who had been cursed, and that I was therefore predestined to be a slave. This had nothing to do with anything I was, or contained, or could become; my fate had been sealed forever, from the beginning of time. And it seemed, indeed, when one looked out over Christendom, that this was what Christendom effectively believed. (Baldwin, 1963, p. 36).

Especially after the Vietnam war, after the black people realized that the United States did not treat them like real US citizens, and after all the brutality and nonsense they saw in the war, their faith and faith in religion waned, and with that, many leaders who were the support and guide of the soldiers who came back from the Vietnam war were assassinated. The effects of black political parties began to increase as a result of the loss of functions and effects. Active groups such as the Black Panthers acted with the Marxist/Leninist mindset and agreed that this was the most effective and beneficial way for them to seek their rights. The movement of blacks under the umbrella of the Black Panthers did not result in democratic means. Many people were dying every day in the protests that continued with many conflicts and violence. Armament and anti-democratic ways, which are the effects of the revolution belief brought about by the Black Panthers' movement with Marxist/Leninist thought, seemed to be the only way of salvation for them.

We don't think you fight fire with fire best ; we think you fight fire with water best.

We're going to fight racism not with racism, but we're going to fight with solidarity.

We say we're not going to fight capitalism with black capitalism, but we're going to fight it with socialism. We're stood up and said we're not going to fight reactionary pigs and reactionary state's attorneys like this and reactionary state's attorneys like Hanrahan with any other reactions on our part. We're going to fight their reactions with all of us people getting together and having an international proletarian revolution. (Blackout for Human Rights, 2019).

These political parties and other formations, which argue that religion is an opium, say that people's going to church or religious organizations is a 'dream' rather than seeking the rights of African Americans, that this belief that comes from the Middle East and insults blacks in their own opinion is useless, that unification under the church is only short-lived. They argued that it causes encouragement or vice versa, and numbs and poisons people's brains and drives them away from political awareness. They argued that black people can achieve many things with political parties, they can get their rights either through democratic means or through armed revolution, political party leaders are freer and better guided, and people who are there can make more accurate and clear decisions with science, politics, philosophy and inspirations from life. Because all this is life itself for them, not 'fairytales' according to their point of view.

CONCLUSION

The results of the political, philosophical or intellectual struggle of the Black Churches and religious and religious groups, which are the places where the struggle for identity and rights of African Americans, which has been going on for years, have always caused great controversy. ‘Inspiration View’ Many people who are happy with the way the church brings people together and argue that the church, religion, or Christianity can be the way when we privatize, argued that the church can prevent rising racism and protect their rights by black people living and coming together under the church roof. On the other hand, other scholars and thinkers who defend the view that religion is a method used to numb the societies and poison people, argued that black people can only protect their rights under a political view and philosophy, and in this way, black people can be more conscious and act more rationally. The thesis put forward by this ‘Opium View’ is that individuals have argued that religion and holy biblical things make black people think ‘imaginary’ and ‘absurd’ things rather than real life, and that belief against racism will not work. Both views have been debated for years and continue to this day, and both have their proponents and supporters.

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