

Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Cornel West, Barack Obama:

Giving Voice and Purpose to African American Subalterns

by

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Malcolm X, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Dr. Cornel West, and Barack Obama are influential figures who advocate for drastic changes, especially for repressed and oppressed African Americans. The texts selected all respective to the aforementioned authors, *The Ballot or the Bullet*, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, *Strength to Love*, *Race Matters*, *Democracy Matters*, *Dreams from My Father*, and *The Audacity of Hope* all contribute to the thesis' claims. Analysis of the selected texts is aided by New Historicism and Gayatri Spivak's article *Can the Subaltern Speak?* New Historicism's application to the texts reveals that history, politics, and culture impacts the daily struggles of disadvantaged African Americans. Living in a hegemonic postcolonial society, African Americans are interacting with systems intentionally designed to silence and subjugate them, contextualizing them as subalterns according to Gayatri Spivak's theory. These two theories help reveal the similarities between the authors, primarily the means and ends they desire: giving voice and mobility to African American subalterns through religion, politics, and prophetic proximal advocating and collaboration.

Malcolm X, King, West, and Obama advocate for intellectual, spiritual, and hands-on leadership that will shift public focus away from shackling fallacies to freeing truth. These texts

reveal that all four authors passionately faced powerful and stubborn opposition. The authors' persistence despite opposition is accompanied by unwavering and unapologetic love for African American subalterns relegated to the fringes of an American hegemonic society.

It was and is apparent to me that minorities' voices have been relegated to the margins and that elitism and racism perpetuate this today. What became more apparent through investigating the primary texts is that too little changes between the two time periods, and that the negative impacts of the postcolonial systematic creating of subalterns has created cyclical poverty and nihilism. Progress has been made since the first slave ships broached America's shoreline; but, throughout the 20th Century and into the 21st Century, corporate interests and sensationalist money-fueled media machines have shielded, blinded, or at least fogged public perceptions of race relations in America. As evidenced by the texts, Americans are misinformed, partially due to willful ignorance, but also due to complex media and political biases. The authors contend this will change through the power of religion, the influence of politics, and the practicality and intimacy of prophetic leadership engaging with subaltern communities. Through these three focal areas, readers see congruence rarely associated with these four authors.

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Introduction

If we must die—let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot.
If we must die—oh, let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
Oh, Kinsmen! We must meet the common foe;
Though far outnumbered, let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one deathblow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back! (McKay, "If We Must Die")

America is a postcolonial hegemony that intentionally represses some African Americans. Throughout this study, I analyze how the four authors interacted with unjust systems, and how they confront injustice, advocate for others, and collaborate so others may continue the confronting. The epigraph above captures the essence of all four authors' selected texts: bold confronting of injustice while passionately urging kinsmen to unite. I present the passionate authors as foils of each other who refuse to allow oppressive forces to continue intentional subjugation. Two theoretical perspectives aid these goals: New Historicism and Gayatri Spivak's subaltern theory—in this theory Spivak contends that postcolonial societies intentionally create unrepresented and marginalized groups she calls subalterns. New Historicism encourages connecting historical and political circumstances to people's daily lives, especially those in groups who are detrimentally impacted history and politics. It is because of America's intentional repression of African Americans that Gayatri Spivak's theory of subalterns is appropriate for this study. Of course, American society has progressed and not all African Americans are subalterns; however, it is the appropriation of false images and identities that

perpetuates the status of subaltern for impoverished African Americans, especially poor African American youth.

The authors' texts show that groups of African Americans are in cyclical poverty that has created nihilistic mentalities in which the marginalized believe their poverty is inescapable, evidencing their status as subaltern. American colonialism has relegated impoverished African Americans to the fringes, psychologically and financially. Psychological image appropriation is the lynchpin between the authors and Spivak. Spivak discusses misrepresentation and image appropriation extensively in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Spivak's theories work well with the authors' texts as they contend that American society, like other postcolonial societies, subscribes to "the assumption that there *is* a pure form of consciousness," which belongs to the dominant group, not the impoverished minorities (*Can the Subaltern Speak?* 80). In America, this "pure form of consciousness remains an idealistic bedrock which, dismissed as a second-order problem, often earns it the reputation of racism and sexism" (80). The authors desire to aid these subalterns by changing society and consciousness; accomplishing this will utilize similar means for a similar end. Though the authors have been historicized as disparate, they advocate similar goals through similar means. Their differences are apparent; their commonalities are often overlooked.

In regards to postcolonialism and subalterns, Spivak discusses image projection from the powerful to the subaltern. In *Can the Subaltern Speak?* she calls this image projection "hegemony of desire" and "false consciousness" (69). She also discusses similar ideas of false representation and re-representation, which chapter four will discuss in detail. To combat the intentional or unintentional creating of subaltern subjects, postcolonial societies must provide

avenues for mobility and voice; otherwise, silence and stagnation perpetuate. The authors contend this misrepresentation occurs in postcolonial America.

King, for example, argues that subaltern African Americans continue to experience hopelessness and its accompanying behaviors; if change is not sought, any psychological or financial gains may regress to their previous status before the Civil Rights Movement. Hopelessness sparks stagnation, and stagnation is the enemy of progress. It is because of these charges against a postcolonial America that he claims, “For so many people, young and old, the light of hope went out, and they roamed wearily in the dark chambers of pessimism. Many concluded that life has no meaning” (*Strength to Love*, 60). According to all of the authors, life having no meaning is dangerously cyclical, which is due, in part, to the creation of subaltern subjects who are misrepresented or ignored.

This thesis ignores the female voice; the apparent lack of female voices from the selected authors provides further evidence for American patriarchy. There are many pivotal and powerful female minority voices throughout America’s literary history; however the time and space for this thesis will not allow me to include these voices. The patriarchal focus is an intentional connection to the subaltern issue. There is a strong focus on the male voice, which typifies female oppression, especially for the disadvantaged. Spivak’s theories are utilized, in part, to reveal that egalitarianism unites voices and provides progress; gender and racial biases create division and stagnation.

A main focus for Spivak is minority females who she deems as the most oppressed and repressed by colonial societies. All four authors being investigated for this thesis are male, which supports her notion; the Conclusion of this thesis will further explore this patriarchal bias and provide options for future studies to investigate this bias. There are few, or few widely

publicized or promulgated, female civil rights authors in the 1960s, which continues into the 21st Century. Either America's patriarchal society relegates women into obscurity during these time periods, or media bias fails to broadcast impactful women. There are, of course, prominent and powerful female "prophetic voices," but the patriarchal bias remains fixed (*Race Matters* 184).

There is progression between the time periods: Obama and West approach the issues, especially patriarchy, in a more contemporary fashion. Obama and West encourage egalitarianism and desire changes in disparaging treatment of females; however, they are still representing the female voice. King and Malcolm X either ignore or appropriate false consciousness to the female subject. The treatment of the female subject is one example of the authors' roles as foils and not antagonists.

King and Malcolm X, and Obama and West are best viewed as foils of each other and not antagonists. The foils contrast and oppose each other at times, but they are not antagonists. None of the authors attempt widespread thwarting of their counterpart's goals even if they disagree with the others' ideologies and engagement strategies. While Malcolm X and West are outspoken critics of King and Obama, respectively, the authors' commonalities are overlooked. In the selected texts, the foil's disagreements with each other evidence postcolonialism, hegemony, and media bias. Moreover, all four authors directly mention the negative impact of the media on their personal lives, their work as advocates, and the American public's perceptions. Chapter one will thoroughly discuss media misrepresentation, and the New Historicist approach will aid this investigation's look into its causes and effects.

Media outlets have played an integral role in either the confronting or perpetuating of unjust racist practices. For this thesis, media misrepresentation, will be a term applied to media outlets who fail to adequately confront image appropriation and racism; New Historicism and

Spivak's idea of subalterns being silenced in postcolonial societies will be lenses through which the thesis analyzes this disparity. Media misrepresentation impacts the relationship between the leader and their foil; this also perpetuates subalterns' statuses as it projects disparate relational power dynamics between powerful and subjugated. The media presents the authors as diametrically opposed, which is well established by previous scholarship. The authors are, at times, explicitly critical of each other. However, for all four authors, power structures, like media outlets that misrepresent and political groups who oppose progress exaggerate the differences and commonalities such as ideologies, life experiences, and goals, are rarely reported by mass media. This paper contends that the authors contrast in style, persuasive techniques, religious beliefs, method of confronting injustices, and other pivotal, but they are not antagonists. In literary terms, they are more likely foil characters who help reveal attributes of another character by their contrasting and/or challenging. The authors seek the same goal and similarly depict the groups for which they speak.

The authors' depictions of disadvantaged African Americans are better understood with Spivak's subaltern theory. Gayatri Spivak's work *Can the Subaltern Speak?* helps reveal why the subaltern African American communities are facing similar issues to other minority groups in postcolonial societies. Nihilistic mentalities and their accompanying behaviors are direct byproducts of American colonialism's intentional creation of poverty for minorities, which connects Spivak and the four authors. For the authors, this applies to African Americans throughout history, but especially in 20th-21st centuries.

The postcolonial hegemonic creation of self-deprecation and removal of voice depicts the authors' congruence with Spivak's theory. For example, Spivak states, "The clearest available example of such epistemic violence [of creating then ignoring subjugation and repression] is the

remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other” (*Can the Subaltern Speak?* 76). Later in the article, Spivak also discusses that many Westerners within the power structures desire to relegate minorities to a subjugated status. She adds that “this concealed Subject [of the West] pretends it has no geopolitical determinations” despite a clear creation and maintaining of subaltern groups ostracized from advancement (66). The authors all contend that America creates impoverished and disenfranchised African Americans during their respective time periods while America’s power structures proclaim their ignorance or falsely state they desire the opposite.

Spivak, like Malcolm X, King, Obama, and West, believes that environment is impactful and that there is an intentional withholding of resources for groups outside of the power structure, which restricts or removes their mobility; this also hinders their creating of positive identities and self-image. Hegemonic systems create a self-deprecating system in which subalterns cannot see past their unfortunate circumstances (*Can the Subaltern Speak?*). Similarly, in *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama states, “In other words, African Americans understand that culture matters but that culture is shaped by circumstance. We know that many in the inner city are trapped by their own self-destructive behaviors but that those behaviors are not innate” (255). These groups are largely ignored and Spivak reveals the solution, “[Voices of subalterns] is a metaphorical description of building infrastructure, so that the citizen who is cut off from the structures of the state or social mobility can actually access them” (Message from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak). In some cases, the four authors contend the cutting off of resources—such as consistent employment that provides self-worth or financial resources for class mobility—are byproducts of long-established hypocritical systems. Other benefits, such as equal treatment regardless of class, race, or gender, are knowingly withheld by postcolonial

hegemonic power structures. The authors reveal that America's withholding of beneficial psychological and tangible resources directly create nihilism, cyclical poverty, and self-degradation; these are primary connections to Spivak's theory that postcolonial society's Other are subalterns.

Personal choice is penchant for the authors; however, all agree that a postcolonial environment imposes unnecessary and unnatural detriments upon African Americans, especially those in poverty. Choice is paramount, but choice is undeniably influenced by environment; they contend that one of the most notable negative influences is American postcolonialism, which strains or blocks African American's ability to progress psychologically, advance economically, and to receive equal respect and treatment. Spivak's subaltern theory and authors' discussions of nihilism are captured well by Malcolm X's personal experiences. His autobiography provides a microcosmic reference for the ideas discussed by Spivak and the other authors. Prior to incarceration, Malcolm X is nihilistic, lacks a voice, and was removed from the possibility of advancement. The withholding of voice and mobility are detrimental to the economic and psychological status of impoverished African American communities in which Malcolm X lives, just as they are for the communities Spivak discusses.

Class mobility and withholding of resources, however, are not the only areas of focus for the authors as they discuss their desired shifts away from hegemony; others include identity, individual and community responsibility, political responsibility, an accurate following of the Bible for those who are Christians, and leadership's engagement with subaltern communities. These are all essential paradigms and practices discussed by the selected texts. As the authors continue the dialectics reminiscent of civil rights forerunners such as Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, and WEB Du Bois, many Americans refuse to accept change and attempt to maintain

or even re-subjugate black communities in various ways. Increasing my knowledge of race matters, political matters, and religious matters broadened my understanding and revealed the issues' complex scope and depth.

One example of this complexity is evidenced by West discussing new issues of identity crisis and lack of acceptance facing the increasing African American middle class. Nihilism and hedonism impact African American middle class identities due to their desires to assimilate into the dominant culture or maintain cultural autonomy; a constant entertainment bombardment designed to anesthetize also impacts their identities. According to West, many middle class African Americans seek the tenuously plausible acceptance into the white majority group. West claims that an example of this type of acceptance is affirmative action, which makes their acceptance in the majority's native grounds precarious and possibly unwanted; however, he also contends that affirmative action is a necessary evil in order to begin to reduce economic and ideological disparities (*Democracy Matters* 93-97). Like Spivak's theories, New Historicism applies well to all of the texts and helps reveal the issues' complexity and truths.

New Historicism also applies well to the authors and their claims about African American subalterns. Specifically, this theory helps readers understand the causes and effects of postcolonial hegemonic creation of African American subaltern communities. This theory argues that texts are inseparable from the historical time period in which they are created; also, knowingly or not, authors and their works are impacted by preceding literatures and cultures. Reminiscent of Spivak's theory, consciousness is permanently impacted by the dominant culture and the preceding dominant cultures. New Historicism highlights "power relations," and its theorists interpret texts as being "actively involved in the making of history through its participation in discursive practices" (Bertens 157 and 158). That New Historicism applied to my

original ideas became more apparent as I compared the authors' texts. All of the authors and, consequently, their texts are clearly impacted by a postcolonial American culture and numerous other occurrences; they all also claim racists and corrupt individuals inside institutions such as the media, religious, and political structures unfairly represent them. Obama implies New Historicism's applications to this study in *Dreams from My Father* when he intimates how much Malcolm X's autobiography impacted his own mentalities and perceptions of both himself and his surroundings:

Only Malcolm X's autobiography seemed to offer something different. His repeated acts of self-creation spoke to me; the blunt poetry of his words, his unadorned insistence on respect, promised a new and uncompromising order, martial in its discipline, forged through sheer force of will. All the other stuff, the talk of blue-eyed devils and apocalypse, I decided, religious baggage that Malcolm X himself seemed to have safely abandoned toward the end of his life. (86)

In this quote, the reader also sees evidence that New Historicism applies to Malcolm X's life, or at least Obama's interpretation of Malcolm X's life. Malcolm X was susceptible to falsehoods, exaggerations, and alternative facts because of the influence of the dominant culture. Malcolm X's initial public persona vastly contrasted his later ideologies. Malcolm X, as revealed through his autobiography and Obama's interpretation, initially believed white people were inherently evil, capable of only superficial virtuous behavior because his limited vision revealed them as such.

New Historicism is well-defined by Aram Veesser in the introduction to his text *The New Historicism*. He contends there are five essential tenets or "assumptions" of New Historicism that, "despite its heterogeneity," New Historicists practice:

1. that every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices;
2. that every act of unmasking, critique, and opposition uses the tools it condemns and risks falling prey to the practice it exposes;
3. that literary and non-literary "texts" circulate inseparably;

4. that no discourse, imaginative or archival, gives access to unchanging truths nor expresses inalterable human nature;
5. ... that a critical method and a language adequate to describe culture under capitalism participate in the economy they describe. (xi)

While all five assumptions apply well to the selected texts and their authors, assumptions 1, 2, and 4 aid the analysis of the authors' contentions. The authors and the subalterns' expressive acts are embedded in networks of material practices. The authors risk consequences when unmasking, critiquing, and opposing power structures by utilizing the tools of the power structure. This is especially true for Obama's quest for political influence and the authors' interactions with Christianity. Finally, the authors express that discourse and accompanying actions are caused by the truths disseminated by both history and modern media, and these discourses, actions, and individuals involved are changeable.

All four authors' primary texts reveal these three assumptions and other aspects of New Historicism well. For example, Malcolm X's autobiography and Obama's *Dreams from My Father* both contend that behavior and ideologies are influenced by America's unjust present and historical systems of repression. Subaltern's environments are inextricably impacted by the dominant culture's disparaging economic, ideological, media, entertainment, religious, and education systems. Malcolm X microcosmically displays this in his autobiography as he shifts from silenced subaltern to prophetic voice. He examines the unjust systems around him, realizing, like New Historicists, that all behavior is creating a "subversive interpretation of a dominant culture" while he records his "alien interpretations" (Greenblatt, 49). Greenblatt, who many consider the founder of the theory, also utilizes New Historicism to investigate how the dominant culture's primary desire is retaining its power. This, of course, becomes problematic when dissenting voices arise like we see from Malcolm X, King, Obama, and West. According to Greenblatt, readers must remember that "power, even in a colonial situation, is not perfectly

monolithic and hence may encounter and record in one of its functions materials that can threaten another of its functions; in part that power thrives on vigilance, and human beings are vigilant if they sense a threat; in part that power defines itself in relation to such threats or simply to that which is not identical with it” (Greenblatt, 50). If the dominate culture or group cannot silencing these threats, misrepresentation emanates from media outlets and those in power. In the cases of the authors, bias American media outlets, politicians, and racists explicitly condemn and misrepresent in attempts to discredit.

As Malcolm creates his alien interpretation, readers see two distinct paradigmatic shifts, which are the result of exposure to different ideas and environments. Negative power interactions and misrepresentations limit Malcolm X’s exposures to white people. First, his interpretation shifts from blind hatred to a distrust and desire for separation as he wants to avoid “assimilation” and to have African American “heritage preserved” (283). Though he never directly mentions the theory, after Malcolm X goes on his pilgrimage to Mecca, he implies that he understands the theories developed by New Historicists. His newfound understanding is, in part, that “the self is always a construction, that our identity is never given, but always the product of an interaction between the way we want to represent ourselves—through the stories we tell (or the incidents we suppress) and our actual presentations—and the power relations of which we are part” (Bertens, 157). Malcolm X realizes the environment and cultural forces that have negatively impacted black men have also been forced upon white men, and that “the white man is *not* inherently evil, but America’s racist society influences him to act evilly. The society has produced and nourishes a psychology which brings out the lowest, most base part of human beings” (*Autobiography*, 378). Malcolm X shed the prison-like environment of repression and oppression and attains a different perspective, which helps him create a very different interpretation.

Like Malcolm, Obama also learns this lesson abroad. Obama, as he seeks meaning and identity, begins to consider how knowledge is accepted as Truth, and how this impacts American culture's disparities. When visiting his family in Kenya, Obama learns that actions are predicated on previous actions, and that present disparities are inextricable from a disparaging past. To the readers of *Dreams from My Father*, Obama intimates this lesson through a metaphor. Kenya's ancient landscape is imposing and Obama captures this as he personifies the emanating power:

Eventually, the rain stopped, and we found ourselves looking on a barren landscape of gravel and shrub and the occasional baobab tree, its naked searching branches decorated with the weaver bird's spherical nests. I remembered reading somewhere that the baobab could go for years without flowering, surviving on the sparsest of rainfall; and seeing the trees there in the hazy afternoon light, I understood why men believed they possessed a special power –that they housed ancestral spirits and demons, that humankind first appeared under such a tree. ... each tree seemed to possess a character, a character neither benevolent nor cruel but simply enduring, with secrets whose depths I would never plumb, a wisdom I would never pierce. They both disturbed and comforted me, those trees that looked as if they might uproot themselves and simply walk away, were it not for the knowledge that on this earth one place is not so different from another –the knowledge that one moment carries within it all that's gone on before. (435-6)

All of the authors, though decades apart and without mentioning the theory, understand that both their lives and their works are inextricable from the time periods into which they are born.

Similarly, they all contend that subaltern African Americans have, metaphorically, survived on this sparse rainfall, surviving and thriving due to their internal power, which their forerunners revealed. Leaders must acknowledge this strength persistence to endure in order to help the disadvantaged persist despite widespread oppression. Obama's claim that each moment is irretrievably impacted by the moments that precede it directly applies New Historicism to his own experiences.

New Historicism also furthers the authors' claims that power structures desire to perpetuate the status of subalterns. This is accomplished, in part, through American media. In both time periods, the 1960s and the end of the 20th-beginning of 21st centuries, media bias

creates the perception that one leader is a rabid radical and the other more white-friendly or docile. Through the selected primary texts, the authors reveal that Malcolm X and West are viewed as more unsafe and radical; King and Obama, though viewed negatively by power structures, are not ostracized as severely. New Historicists contend this bias occurs because power desires suppression, “The new historicism is, in the tradition of Foucault, focused on thus far hidden and unsuspected sources of, and vehicles for, power and on the question of how power has worked to suppress or marginalize rival stories and discourses” (Bertens 158). Both the government and media complex purport false or sensationalized images and statements regarding the leader.

There is a strong silence motif—from media and other power structures—that occurs throughout Malcolm X’s autobiography, King’s *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, Obama’s *Dreams from My Father* and *The Audacity of Hope*, and West’s *Democracy Matters* and *Race Matters*. This silence reveals intentional hypocrisy. The authors desire autonomy of thought, voice, and mobility for themselves and all people. Both the powerful and the marginalized must attempt to interrupt this silence. Obama contends that positive change will reduce disparities; he reveals, “the black community remains convinced that if America finds its will [to break the silence], then circumstances for those trapped in the inner city can be changed, individual attitudes among the poor will change in kind, and the damage can gradually be undone” (*Audacity of Hope*, 255). All four authors further contend, with the New Historicists, that “the question of the relation between cultural analysis and psychoanalysis arises naturally in connection with their vision of how power ‘subjects,’ that is to say, how power imposes itself on, or even better, forms or creates individual” (Gearhart, 458). If this power continues to subject, so

will cyclical nihilism and self-destructive behaviors. The authors contend that environment creates mentalities and patterns of behavior that further isolate African American communities.

Viewing American society and the authors using both New Historicism and Spivak's subaltern postcolonial theory led to personal expansions of understanding, which raised more questions than I had at the inception of my idea. If acceptance and equality are merely superficial or tenuously plausible at best, what is the point of the Civil Rights Movement and integration? Is decreasing nihilism and creating a path for monetary gain for subalterns the overall goal, or is there something missing? As a white male, what is my role? How does the subaltern female fit into this equation? What has caused this rift between black and white to break through the seams sewn so passionately by Dr. King and, yes, Malcolm X also? According to Cornel West in *Race Matters*, the threads were loosed by capitalism, corporate consumption complex, and the prison-industrial complex. If democracy really matters and capitalism is not inherently evil, where does that leave the jobless and luckless individuals carrying the leftover hatred and anger from colonialism?

Investigating questions like these is where my thesis really began. In a short answer to many of the above questions, the authors feel that jobs are essential, and the government should create opportunity for mobility and advancement for the most downtrodden and hopeless; however, that will only solve a portion of the issues, more importantly, it will only solve an *external* issue. The issues are internal and will perpetuate unless those in power treat them as such. In *Race Matters*, West indicates a dual approach, "Without some redistribution of wealth and power, downward mobility and debilitating poverty will continue to drive people into desperate channels. And without principled opposition to xenophobias from above *and* below, these desperate channels will produce a cold-hearted and mean-spirited America no longer worth

fighting for or living in” (116). In order to bring racial and democratic change we can all believe in, honest dialectics that utilize Socratic questioning must take place. West describes this Socratic questioning as “relentless self-examination and critique of institutions of authority, motivated by an endless quest for intellectual integrity and moral consistency. It is ... courageous opposition to the seductive yet nihilistic sophists” (*Democracy Matters* 16). All of the authors advocate for this type of opposition; therefore, the thesis will refer to their contentions as Socratic questioning.

The dreams of King and the passionate love of Malcolm X must permeate every community, likely from the bottom and then to the top. As Malcolm X eloquently stated in his speech *The Ballot or the Bullet*, “Whether we are Christians or Muslims or nationalists or agnostics or atheists, we must first learn to forget our differences” (par 4). Of course, he was talking about confronting injustice perpetrated by oppressive whites. But, like the other three authors he realizes and reveals that there are additional enemies, enemies condemned by all four authors: hypocrisy, xenophobia, nihilism, misrepresentation, hedonism, and hatred.

Chapter One: Historical Context and Misrepresentation

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
 We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise,
 We wear the mask! (Dunbar, “We Wear the Mask”)

Each author has unique experiences that shape their identity and the image they portray; these experiences create the authors’ belief in the need for Socratic Questioning. This image is intentionally misrepresented by the media. As stated in the Introduction, when discussing this issue, I apply the term “media” to those who desire repression or stagnation for disadvantaged minorities; this term also applies to individuals utilizing this power structure to disseminate false narratives that appropriates a degraded identity and misinformation to discredit those seeking equality. While the authors are able to reveal this misrepresentation as their influential positions allow them to speak for themselves, the subalterns they advocate for are misrepresented and mute due to the mass media complex. This chapter will unify the authors through their claims against the media. All four authors claim that hegemonic media practices have hindered their bringing voice and mobility to subaltern African Americans.

This chapter begins with historical occurrences that shape the authors’ perspectives toward subalterns and reveal their willingness to sacrifice. This lays the foundation that the

authors' ends are similar. Positing the authors into their historical periods, serves two purposes: to uncover what shapes their ideologies pertaining to subalterns, and to examine why they believe damaging power structure forces such as the media are repressing subalterns' mobility. The authors' varied upbringings and encounters with religion, politics, opposition, and/or community influence their views of the disadvantaged and impoverished. This and subsequent chapters will reveal that, despite their differing life experiences, the authors' actions and ideologies for subalterns has much in common.

Media—as aforementioned, this term applies to select outlets and correspondents who desires silencing and stagnation—misrepresentation and the consequent damaging effects it has on their goals for subalterns is another pivotal area that establishes the authors as foils not antagonists. The authors refuse to accept this hegemonic appropriation of consciousness. As aforementioned, Spivak discusses this appropriation of consciousness onto subalterns as damaging and a main contributor of ideological repression. Misrepresentation and false consciousness create cyclical psychological degradation.

Following the biographical perspective-shaping events, chapter one depicts hegemonic misrepresentations as heaping difficulty onto the already arduous task of bringing voice and mobility to subalterns. Opponents of the authors' ideologies seek to discredit them whenever possible and are supported by political pundits and media outlets. Changes sought and experienced by the authors are brought about, in part, by Socratic questioning; all of the authors have experiences in their early lives that, in their opinions, establishes the need for Socratic questioning.

Perhaps even more than the other authors, Malcolm X's childhood and adulthood are fraught with change. These changes created a willingness to practice Socratic questioning and

accept hardships for the sake of improving the lives of the marginalized. Malcolm X's desires to give voice and opportunity to subalterns begins in prison and remains constant through his leaving the Nation of Islam. Malcolm X's passionate love for the disadvantaged, and his desires to help them progress remains unchanged following his second conversion experience in Mecca. Malcolm's selection of reading materials, speeches, debates in prison, and second conversion evince a strong desire to use Socratic questioning of himself and others as he seeks to understand America's hegemonic system and find solutions for the disadvantaged.

Much of what is known about Malcolm X's life and perspectives is delivered through his autobiography (Brown). The autobiography and *The Ballot or the Bullet* both depict his use of Socratic questioning in searching for solutions. This questioning reveals his changing mentalities toward whites and subalterns. The autobiography reveals that Malcolm X's early childhood shape his perspective toward those on the fringes of societies, especially disadvantaged African Americans. Malcolm X is immediately plunged into a world of inequalities and identity crises, which creates helps unleash his later "painful wisdom seeking" through Socratic questioning (*Democracy Matters* 16). It is telling that Malcolm X begins his autobiography with the following:

When my mother was pregnant with me, she told me later, a party of hooded Ku Klux Klan riders galloped up to our home ... Surrounding the house, brandishing their shotguns and rifles they shouted for my father to come out ... The Klansmen shouted threats and warnings at her ... the Klansmen finally spurred their horses and galloped around the house, shattering every window pane with their gun butts. (1)

Malcolm X lives with his mother and father until his father is brutally murdered by white supremacists for his dissemination of both the messages of equality and Marcus Garvey's black nationalism movement. Many agree that, "Through his father's example, Malcolm X's black nationalism derives more or less directly from Marcus Garvey" (Brown 14). Malcolm X conveys

that his paradigms toward race and justice are rooted in the cowardly murder of his father by white racists. After his father's death, Malcolm X's mother begins to lose her sanity, forcing Malcolm X and his siblings to mature quickly (Autobiography).

Malcolm X's initial interactions with whites are disconcerting, but very influential in shaping his perspectives toward disadvantaged populations. During his formative years, Malcolm X states that he is treated as a mascot by whites and is somewhat popular because his blackness is a novelty. Malcolm X's teacher unintentionally reinforces his beliefs and impassions him when the teacher tells Malcolm X that he should not be a lawyer but should look for manual labor work

Another negative encounter with whites comes from the Autobiography as Malcolm X eloquently describes his mother's sanity being ripped from her because of America's perpetuation of racist ideologies. He angrily laments that his mother suffers because of conditions "that existed because of a society's failure, hypocrisy, greed, and lack of mercy and compassion. Hence I have no mercy or compassion in me for a society that will crush people, and then penalize them for not being able to stand up under the weight" (22). Malcolm X is born into an environment of hatred, violence, and degradation. Because of these early experiences, Malcolm X takes a path of justified indignation with American injustice. It is also because of Malcolm X's early experiences that he utilizes Socratic questioning to bring about internal and societal change. These, and other encounters with whites, incept his impassioned aggressive opposition of America's injustices toward African American subalterns.

Many of the autobiographies' chapter titles reveal how influential other perspectives are upon Malcolm X's identity, further revealing the need for New Historicism. Malcolm X implies that image projection can become identity projection and is another cause of nihilism and apathy.

For instance, “Mascot, ‘Homeboy,’ Detroit Red, Hustler, Satan” are chapter titles and are all degrading nicknames given to Malcolm X by others. These names are his image, he argues, not his identity; but, due to his lack of exposure and the lack of prophetic voices, they temporarily are his identity. Other chapter titles, such as “Nightmare,” “Trapped,” “Caught,” and “Out” reveal the inescapable pattern of destruction American racism thrusts upon unknowing victims, even children. “Out” refers to Malcolm X’s decision to leave the Nation of Islam; Malcolm X reveals that the racist ideologies of the Nation of Islam are predicated on American racism. Getting “Out” reveals his shift away from an Islam focused on black reaction to white racism, to true Islam focused on Mecca and the Koran.

Eventually, through Socratic questioning, Malcolm X decides his own identity. This begins with the chapter, “Harlemite.” Malcolm X reveals why he is searching for identity in Harlem by stating “my father had described Harlem with pride, and showed us pictures of the huge parades by the Harlem followers of Marcus Garvey” (73). Unfortunately, meaningful and positive opportunities are scarce at this point in his life, and the poison of racism has already created self-deprecating nihilistic mentalities. Malcolm X’s eventual shift and solidification of a positive self-image and identity is symbolically displayed through his new name, which is also a chapter title, “El Hajj Malik el-Shabazz.” This is an essential shift: Malcolm X uses Socratic questioning and decides his own identity instead of allowing others to dictate that for him. Of course, his image is still eventually tarnished by biased media outlets, which this chapter further discusses later.

Obama’s life and his attitudes toward subalterns are characterized by directed passion, which the selected texts reveal. Obama, like Malcolm X, includes many details about his childhood. These experiences, and his experiences as a community organizer, are integral in

shaping his willingness to use Socratic questioning and shapes mentalities toward subalterns. Having a white mother and black African father impacts Obama's self-image, especially during his formative years; however, because he spends much of his childhood in Hawaii and the Philippines, he reveals that he was thankfully isolated from much of the racial tumult experienced by Malcolm X and King. Obama, like the other authors, must still use Socratic questioning as he solidifies his identity and roles in a racially disparate America.

A particularly impactful time necessitating Socratic questioning occurs in *Dreams from My Father*. Readers learn that Obama moves to the Philippines with his mother and her new husband, Lolo. Though Obama is very young, his conversations with Lolo create opportunities for Socratic questioning and shape his opinion toward those on the fringes of societies. Lolo attempts to teach Obama a few key lessons, but Obama gleans a different meaning from the events by questioning their macro sociological causes. When Obama chases him, the boy throws a rock and hits Obama, "It wasn't fair ... He had cheated," laments a young Obama (35). After this, Lolo teaches Obama to fight and tries to teach him that people must look out for themselves. Obama recalls more of the perspective-shaping conversation as Lolo asks, "'How many beggars are there on the street?' I tried to imagine the number that had come by the house in the last week. 'You see?' [Lolo] said, once it was clear I'd lost count. 'Better to save your money and make sure you don't end up on the street yourself' (39). Obama eventually learns that politics plays a role in the poverty, largely caused by politically-charged mass murders, and United States officials orchestrated some of the violence. Despite Lolo's attempts, Obama gleans that people must take care of themselves, but there are situations into which people are placed that they cannot control and cannot escape; they are subalterns and leaders must aid them if the government wishes to avoid nihilism and its accompanying threats.

Another key lesson for Obama related to subalterns comes from his biological father. Like Malcolm X, Obama intimates that history's racist mistreatment of African Americans negatively impacts his own self-image; this psychological struggle has an irreversible impact on how Obama views subalterns. Unlike Malcolm X, Obama's father was alive but infrequently involved in his life. In *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama states that he desires to be a better father for his own children and to help other children attain the same, especially the disadvantaged and poor. In the same work, Obama reflects upon how his father's absence impacts his identity. He explains, "Someone once said that every man is trying to either live up to his father's expectations or make up for his father's mistakes, and I suppose that may explain my particular malady as well as anything else" (3). Obama later reflects upon himself and history, "I am a prisoner of my own biography: I can't help but view the American experience through the lens of a black man of mixed heritage, forever mindful of how generations of people who looked like me were subjugated and stigmatized, and the subtle and not so subtle ways that race and class continue to shape our lives" (10). This struggle follows Obama throughout his childhood and shapes his ideologies concerning not just African American subalterns, but those of any race.

Contrasting Obama and Malcolm X's texts, King and West's do not substantially elaborate on their personal lives because the texts are not autobiographical; however, in the texts, the men reveal personal accounts that impact their paradigms toward the disadvantaged and marginalized. King's belief that Christianity is a religion of love impacts his perspective toward subalterns; hatred toward King evinces only love from King, which typifies his life and perspectives toward all people, including subalterns. As Hunt discusses in *Martin Luther King: resistance, nonviolence and community*, King's nonviolent path is one that causes him suffering

but shapes changes to injustice during and following King's life; King responds to enemies and friends with determined strength rooted in love:

King's prophetic vision of nonviolence would spawn a religious and social movement unparalleled in American history ... As much as nonviolence was the foundation that brought about social change, King viewed nonviolence as a process toward spiritual growth and the realisation of authentic community. For King, nonviolence was not an end in itself – but a means for the church and society to appropriate community; for him it was a philosophy that clearly had its roots in the black church. (Hunt 243)

King's willingness to approach social strife and Christianity with love shows his prophetic vision. Socratic questioning is a major facet of this prophetic vision of nonviolence and is, perhaps, his most notable contribution to the social changes for African American subalterns (Hunt).

Hatred directed toward King undoubtedly impacts his resilience and determination to help the disadvantaged and forgotten; King mentions this hatred in both *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* and *Strength to Love* as he discusses bombings, stabbings, threats on himself and his family, unwarranted abuse, undue criticisms from fellow clergymen, a desire from power structures for King to remain silent, and immoral arrests. Prophetic vision allows King to see past the immediate dangers and hardships created by hatred; Socratic questioning enables him to create positive and long-lasting solutions through love and sacrifice.

Though many scholars, including Hunt, discuss others' love for King, King only mentions this briefly in *Strength to Love*. Hunt claims that King loves all, including his enemies with an "Agape" love not an "eros" or "philia" love; "philia" love is the type that most had for King and that King had for companions (249). In *Martin Luther King Jr., Heroism, and African American Literature*, Trudier Harris contends, "Although an intellectual, King was embraced and revered by those African Americans often at the bottom rungs of the economic/social ladder" (Harris 3). It is, in part, due to the philia love and encouragement from these people that King

perseveres in serving subalterns even though he is mentally, spiritually, and physically exhausted.

At such times of exhaustion, King contends that his strength comes from both God and his parishioners who persevere despite society's crushing oppression. After receiving numerous death threats and a call from a racist who threatens his life and family, King laments, "The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they too will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left" (*Strength to Love* 113). This short excerpt reveals Socratic thinking and is concluded by King stating that he receives power from "the presence of the Divine," but that is not the only encouragement he receives (113). As King faces continued despair from bomb threats, racist callers, and a potentially failing protests, a parishioner comforts and emboldens him. As she realizes his frustrations, she fires, "Is it that we ain't doing things to please you? Or is it that the white folks is bothering you? ... I don't told you we is with you all the way.' ... 'But even if we ain't with you, God's gonna take care of you.' As she spoke these consoling words, everything in me quivered and quickened with the pulsing tremor of raw energy" (*Strength to Love* 126). King's strength to resist comes from his Agape love for subalterns, which he derives from God and the disadvantaged themselves; his creative confrontation strategies comes from his willingness to utilize Socratic thinking and questioning.

King uses Socratic questioning to guide his responses to criticisms and hatred. Both in his *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* and *Strength to Love*, he reveals that loving his enemies is not an easy task but was one that he deems necessary based on Jesus' commands. He contends, "Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that" (*Strength to Love* 51). Throughout *Strength to Love*, King reflects upon various societal formations like Marxism, Capitalism, and Communism in

order to ponder which is the most apt to bring change and Christian love; to inform his interpretations of American postcolonial oppression he analyzes historical writings from a wide array of authors like Abraham Lincoln, William Shakespeare, G.K. Chesterton, Thomas Jefferson, and Adolf Hitler to name a few. This willingness to engage diverse thought and struggle with interpretation and meaning depicts King's effective use of Socratic questioning. Socratic questioning necessitates his use of Christ's strength and Gandhi's methods to bring about change for African American subalterns (*Strength to Love*).

Like King, West states he uses Socratic questioning to aid subalterns with the strength he garners from Christianity. This Socratic questioning informs his views on democracy, politics, and race; these views lead West to contend that change for African American subalterns will come from a prophetic Christianity not a Constantinian Christianity. West describes Constantinian Christianity as a farce, and more of an idea centralized around maintaining control and order rather than a practice of social justice. He claims those who follow this form of Christianity "are sincere in their faith and pious in their actions. But they are relatively ignorant of the crucial role they play in sponsoring American imperial ends" (*Democracy Matters* 150). This is a Christianity whose participants feel a detached superiority to those less fortunate. Constantinian Christianity alleviates concern and guilt for those who Christ claims have a responsibility to the disadvantaged.

West sees this detachment in both Christianity and the Academe, but he feels faith will drive changes in attitudes toward working with impoverished minorities. Because of this, some critics view West as the having the intellect of WEB Du Bois without the detachment from the common citizen, which some claim of Du Bois; West maintains King's pragmatism and charisma but derides Du Bois and other academics' detachment, calling it "ridiculous" (Monroe

40). Lamenting the detachment that Christianity and the Academe have with the modern subaltern, West contends that Christianity provides a powerful force in the battle for social and paradigmatic changes. Because of his views, some Christians and academics view West with disdain and disapproval. However, West's willingness to use Socratic questioning encourages discussing contentious issues.

American Constantinian Christianity is the main enemy of this paradigmatic change. The antithesis of Constantinian Christianity is prophetic Christianity. Prophetic Christianity combats evils and seeks out the correct answer through internal and interpersonal dialogues; Constantinian Christianity assumes the right answer is already in place and seeks to maintain unjust power structures. In *Democracy Matters*, West states, "This prophetic Christianity is an ecumenical force for good, and if we are to revitalize the democratic energies of the country, we must reassert the vital legitimacy of this prophetic Christianity in our public life, such as the principles of public service" (152). According to the aforementioned articles by Hunt and Brown, King practices this prophetic Christianity. West advocates for prophetic proximal confronting of Constantinian Christianity as he believes its hypocrisies perpetuate disparities and instill nihilistic mentalities in African American subalterns. According to West, Christians must confront this, especially the "black church [that] is losing its prophetic fervor in the age of the American empire" (*Democracy Matters* 158). One of West's hallmarks is engaging in controversial confrontation; this did not just begin with his experiences in Academe.

Since his early childhood, West has had a disdain for oppression and injustice, and is willing to sacrifice, question, and confront injustice. Sylvester Monroe, a former Undergraduate Harvard classmate of West's, recalls an episode of West's childhood that depicts early uses of Socratic questioning when confronting injustice:

Initially, West seemed headed for trouble. He was expelled from elementary school for hitting a teacher who tried to make him recite the Pledge of Allegiance. His refusal was a protest against segregation, influenced by the local chapter of the Black Panthers, whose office was near his family's church. It was, in effect, the beginning of West's career as the self-styled "intellectual freedom fighter" that he calls himself today. (40)

Opponents' scrutiny of West's methods for engaging with subalterns has caused West to intensify his efforts. This willingness to confront injustice despite possible ramifications makes West unpopular with some, including during his tenure at Harvard.

West devotes an entire chapter of *Democracy Matters* to discussing the distrust of him by a new administration at Harvard. While not as vehement as a bomber or violent knife attack, it does reveal West's willingness to engage in conflict to bring voice for African American subalterns. When faced with these criticisms, West does not back down; in fact, he follows the same course he previously establishes: continue his workload, which he had just voluntarily increased to levels that exceed most of his colleagues, and address the disparities facing African American communities by engaging proximally with their culture. West's public dispute surrounding his leaving Harvard University edifies this notion of Socratic engagement and reiterates his uncompromising nature.

This dispute also exemplifies the media's misrepresentation of the authors. West relates the real story, which is devoid of much of the confrontation, avarice, and bitterness purported by media outlets. The new president of Harvard University, Lawrence Summers, was allegedly dissatisfied and West felt he was being unfairly treated, which he describes in the article "Why I Left Harvard for Princeton," as being treated like "miscreant graduate student" (67). In the same article, West answers some of the questions surrounding his leaving of Harvard and the miscommunications between himself and administration, and the lies disseminated by that administration and the media.

In a sense, West says he understands their frustrations with a professor who is a “bluesman” because, “As a rule, university administrations like their teachers contained. They're comfortable with strict definitions and tight boundaries when it comes to faculty members and their public posture” (West 64). West disagrees with the new president before they met face-to-face. This was due to media reports that discuss Summers’ political ideas and inhumane positions on affirmative action, pollution, equality of all, and the sanctity of the life of those at the bottom of society’s oppressive forces. West believes Summers desires to maintain an unjust homeostasis similar to Constantinian Christianity. However, the true impasse between the two comes as Summers lies to the media about his interactions with West. West’s life exemplifies a willingness to engage in diverse dialectics but an unwillingness to compromise his ideals, evidenced by his protests of injustice as a child and as a faculty at Harvard. The paradox for West and the other authors is that, while they are unwilling to compromise on cases of injustice, they believe that Socratic questioning with diverse participation is the only logical and reasonable method for incepting a solution. They are willing to open mindedly discuss solutions for subalterns, but they will not allow for postcolonialism’s proponents to subjugate minorities.

Media misrepresentation is well evidenced in at least one of the texts for all four authors. This dispute between West and Harvard’s administration exemplifies the media’s role in misrepresenting the leaders. West describes the incident as a private one between two parties who were polemic in their views on education, politics, equality, and the role of academic institutions. The media exacerbates the rifts and fallaciously antagonizes West. Lamenting both the media spotlight on a private dispute and the media misrepresentation of the same, West recalls, “Though the encounter should never have become news, because of the explosive nature of the situation—a clash between a prominent black Harvard professor and the brash new Jewish

Harvard president—it became a news bombshell. This experience gave me a personal taste of the media’s crass, sentimental nihilist quest for a juicy story” (*Democracy Matters* 194). Despite a positive track record, evidenced by an illustrious history of scholarship, attendance for teaching duties, and willingness to sacrifice time for his students, West was charged with laziness and apathy.

Democracy Matters reveals frustrated recollections from West, “TV pundits were charging me with never showing up for classes, spending all my time in the recording studio, refusing to write books, publishing mediocre texts years ago, and mau-mauing Summers to enhance my salary” (195). Not only were the reports false, they were damaging to West and the University’s reputations. Because of the false perspective and time consuming focus on this dispute, the mass media complex compounds the difficulty of addressing real and pressing issues of injustice (*Democracy Matters*). In *Race Matters*, West reveals that the media exacerbates the difficulties of trying to aid subalterns.

However, media misrepresentation does not dampen West’s passion, especially for oppressed youth. West states simply why he desires to work so closely with impoverished youth, which is due, in part, to fallacious media practices. He claims oppressed youth have a narrow focus intentionally inserted by a mass media complex, which creates negative ideologies and actions. He adds that too many cope “with this bombardment [through] addiction—to drugs, alcohol, sex, or narrow forms of popularity or success. These addictions leave little room or time for democratic efforts to become mature, concerned about others, or politically engaged in social change ... In short, many lack the necessary navigational skills to cope with the challenges and crises of life” (*Democracy Matters* 176). This ideological bombardment creates a limited focus and skewed perspectives in disadvantaged youth; consequently, without a change in environment

and the providing of additional support, Constantinian Christianity, racist hegemonic practices, apathy, and nihilism control the minds of the disadvantaged. Psychological oppression creates subalterns out of the disadvantaged. Disparaging media misrepresentation perpetuates this status.

Like West, King experiences disparaging media misrepresentation but does not stop his crusade for equality. Many reporters purport false accusations of toward King: weak, communist, and hypocrite are a few common false accusations. King's opinions on Communism are particularly important for this study that aims to reveal his actions and ideologies toward African American subalterns. The claim of King following Communism detracts attention from the Civil Rights Movement and creates fear amongst potential white sympathizers (*Strength to Love*). King derides this accusation in *Strength to Love* and states that Communism and Christianity are incompatible. These accusations against King damage the unification he desires. King, while a radical rabble-rouser who roused complacency and hypocrisy with every available chance, was not a Communist. In *Strength to Love*, he explains that, "Communism and Christianity are fundamentally incompatible. A true Christian cannot be a true Communist, for the two philosophies are antithetical and all the dialectics of the logicians cannot reconcile them ... Cold atheism wrapped in the garments of materialism, Communism provides no place for God or Christ" (96-7). Despite King's clear statements, his opponents still intentionally misrepresent his position.

Media misrepresentation pervasively impacts King on a personal level. As King works with President Kennedy to pass much-needed civil rights legislations, opponents of these bills use two of King's Civil Rights Movement compatriots to link King to Communism, creating substantial opposition. Jack O'Dell and Stanley Levison are known communist sympathizers; they willingly "parted ways with King's camp so as to keep King from suffering damaging

accusations of also being aligned with Communists ... Though a longtime personal friend of King, [Levison] graciously stepped aside, thereby freeing both Kennedy and King of having to endure the public stings of false accusations” (Miller 429). Opponents of the Civil Rights Movement utilize American’s fear of Communism to discredit Civil Rights legislation and the Movement itself (Miller).

The pervasiveness does not stop at just impacting King’s relationships; the goal is to discredit King. Edward Gilbreath, author of *Martin Luther King Jr.’s Epic Challenge to the Church*, claims “Today ... it’s difficult to conceive of a time when King wasn’t acceptable. But once upon a time, we couldn’t hear King’s prophetic voice due to all the distortion drowning it out”; King being a communist is just one of many accusations purported by mass media (161). King, undaunted by the false portrayals, characteristically contends that Christians should pray for Communists. In *Strength to Love*, King states, “Our hard challenge and our sublime opportunity is to bear witness to the spirit of Christ in fashioning a truly Christian world. If we accept the challenge with devotion and valour, the bell of history will toll for Communism, and we shall make the world safe for democracy and secure for the people of Christ” (105). Like King, Malcolm X receives much criticism because of media misrepresentation caused, in part, by his religious beliefs.

Malcolm X’s disdain of American propagandized misrepresentation begins early in his life. Degradation permeates every early encounter Malcolm X has with whites and the white media. Malcolm X experiences these degradations throughout his childhood and his adult life. Some of his teachers or neighbors would allow black people to be “with them ... [but not] of them” and would see Malcolm X as a “novelty” (28) (29). Others, like Malcolm X’s history teacher Mr. Williams, would intentionally degrade the image and misrepresent the history of

African Americans, causing deep wounds upon Malcolm X's identity and self-image. Malcolm X recalls a particularly enraging occurrence, "Mr. Williams laughed through [the only short paragraph discussing Negro history] in a single breath, reading aloud how the Negroes had been slaves and then were freed, and how they were usually lazy and dumb and shiftless" (30).

Malcolm X's early childhood experiences lay a foundation for Malcolm X to understand that the media is a powerful proponent of a subaltern's status.

Malcolm X argues that some media bias occurs because the collective white man cannot deal with being hated; despite all of the historical and present negative evils, white men cannot accept that black men have hate for them. Malcolm X's experiences during this time are isolated from positive whites with whom he later prays, eats, and converses, which display ideology-shifting equality (Autobiography). Malcolm X's believes black men have justifiable reasons for anger and that white men who are denying civil rights have justifiable reasons for fear (Ballot or the Bullet). Malcolm X's dissent continues as he ironically progresses from a marginalized subaltern to a powerful orator for the Nation of Islam. Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam provide Malcolm X with voice, and he spends the majority of the rest of his life spreading their message, influenced by Islam, of black response to white hate (Autobiography).

Malcolm X's association with the Nation of Islam aids the media's negative portrayal of the Civil Rights Movement, and it detrimentally impacts his later attempts to reconcile differences and garner positive momentum for equality for Muslims and non-Muslims. Malcolm X, of course, has a tenacious history with American media outlets, including toward Alex Haley predating their collaboration to create Malcolm X's autobiography. The boiling point for Malcolm X's relationship with the media occurs as he visits Mecca, but the initial frustrations with America's media machine were created even before Malcolm X's experiences was with the

Nation of Islam. During this stint, he condemns the propagandized version of acceptability and equality disseminated by American mass media (Autobiography). Malcolm X, especially when reflecting upon his own life, condemns a system that lauds white traits and downplays the beauty of being black, claiming it intentionally promotes self-degradation:

[Making my hair look like a white man's] was my first really big step toward self-degradation: when I endured all of that pain, literally burning my flesh to have it look like a white man's hair. I had joined that multitude of Negro men and women in America who are brainwashed into believing that the black people are 'inferior' and the white people 'superior' –that they will even violate and mutilate their God-created bodies to try to look 'pretty' by white standards. (56-7)

Malcolm X buys into the media's portrayal of beauty, but he becomes cognizant of the media's role only after his conversion experience in prison. This experience, and the voice that Elijah Muhammad helps him reveal, releases him from physical and spiritual confinement intentionally placed by postcolonial power structures.

While with the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X garners national attention due to his statements, which he claims were taken out of context and that Michael Eric Dyson claims are hyperbolic. During Malcolm X's time with the Nation of Islam, he claims that the media misrepresents his statements. In his autobiography, he claims, "But I don't care what points I made in the interviews, it practically never got printed the way I said it. I was learning under fire how the press, when it wants to, can twist, and slant," and he later adds, "It would be turned inside out if it got printed at all" (247) (275). Dyson claims that Malcolm X may have intentionally used the media to garner attention, not for himself but for the cause of Civil Rights; Dyson calls this, "Malcolm X's skillful manipulation of white media fascinated by his rhetorical excesses" (143). Whether Malcolm's words were taken out of context unbeknownst to him, or if he intentionally planned these rhetorical excesses, the media attempts to ensure that the public

perception of Malcolm X was focused on the fear that whites are in danger of black violence and hatred.

During Malcolm X's trip to Mecca and Africa, media misrepresentation continues. Malcolm X almost comically recalls the media's quest to find and interview him for actions attributed to the Nation of Islam, of which he is completely unaware, "The major press, radio, and television media in America had representatives in Cairo hunting all over, trying to locate me to interview me about the furor in New York that I had allegedly caused –when I knew nothing about it" (Autobiography 344). After Malcolm X's trip to Mecca and Africa, he realizes just how depraved America's media really is; he concludes that scholars should not solely attribute subalterns' statues to the government or racist whites, but also to "the white man's press [that] refused to convey that I was now attempting to teach Negroes a new direction" (Autobiography 373). Malcolm X also discusses the letters he writes to friends that condemn the media's "propaganda" printed against him and that they refuse to relate Malcolm X's claims of a newfound perspective; he writes, "I'm for truth, no matter who tells it. I'm for justice, no matter who it is for or against. I'm a human being first and foremost, and as such I'm for whoever and whatever benefits humanity *as a whole*" (Autobiography 373). Regardless of how much Malcolm X's perspective may have changed, the media does not disseminate this information. Malcolm X charges the media with twisting his words to suit their desired headlines and even outright fabrication of his statements.

As Malcolm X does, Obama charges the media with misrepresentation to suit their preconceived stories. Like the other three authors, Obama has a precarious relationships with the media but overcomes that to utilize the media for his own goals. Obama believes the media is extremely important, but he maintains a slight distrust, which he discusses throughout *The*

Audacity of Hope. In this text, Obama also reveals, “I –like every other politician at the federal level– am almost entirely dependent on the media to reach my constituents. It is the filter through which my votes are interpreted, my statements analyzed, my beliefs examined. For the broad public at least, I am who the media says I am. I say what they say I say. I become who they say I’ve become” (121). Also throughout *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama reveals that the media, both accurately and inaccurately, utilize quotes from his seminal text *Dreams from My Father* to question him. In this earlier work, Obama is much more confrontational, and he is candid about his mistakes as a youth; he also reveals questions of his own racial identity and struggles to see past America’s previous injustices. The media outlets that supported his political opponents utilized these against Obama by portraying them accurately and inaccurately, especially pertaining to race and Malcolm X.

In *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama reveals that his condemnations of injustice are warranted, but are taken out of context and used against him by the media and their politicians. Like the injustices of the past, Obama states these misrepresentations and misquotes occurred because of money that promises power. He contends, “As for most politicians, money isn’t about getting rich. ... It’s about maintaining status and power; it’s about scaring off challengers and fighting off the fear. Money can’t guarantee victory –it can’t buy passion, charisma, or the ability to tell a story. But without money, and the television ads that consume all the money, you are pretty much guaranteed to lose” (*The Audacity of Hope* 109). It is because of Obama’s knowledge of the media’s importance that he utilizes their influence whenever possible.

Obama admits in the two selected works that he is not wealthy in comparison to many of his Washington counterparts; therefore, he knows he needs to utilize the media carefully. In the article “*Don’t Turn Back*”: *Langston Hughes, Barack Obama, and Martin Luther King, Jr.*,

Jason Miller states that it is because of Obama's foresight and need that he utilizes King's rhetorical strategies. When Obama accepts the nomination as the Democratic candidate for President of the United States, he demonstrates how well he understands the power of the media and persuasion as he borrows from "King's rhetorical prowess" as he practices "voice-merging" in a desire to "remind listeners of the racial significance of the moment in which he has gained the nomination for President. More significantly, for the votes he will need on Election Day, it also builds his rhetorical credibility beyond the racial-binary, so that literate listeners will regard him as a man who stands on the same plane as the now iconic King" (434, 435). Obama, like West, Malcolm X, and King, is misrepresented by the media but utilizes the power of the media to bring voice and possibility to subalterns.

Many authors have connected King and Obama, especially Obama's utilizing King's persuasive strategies; the selected texts reveal that they have similar goals of providing advancement and voice for the marginalized while using similar rhetoric. According to Edward Gilbreath, Obama and King both share a history of criticizing perpetrators of injustice, and then their quotes are taken out of context, making them sound condemning instead of critical and questioning (142). Obama and King's statements criticize power structures that make racial trust and cohesion "tentative," creating an environment that unwittingly and unnecessarily continues silencing and/or subjugating African Americans (*Audacity of Hope* 238). Both Obama and King, along with West and Malcolm X, are misrepresented by the media.

Media outlets report all four authors as uncompromising and passionate, something I believe all would appreciate based upon their unwavering compassion and confidence in their beliefs; however, they are purported as violent, aggressive, and condemning, which are antithetical to the selected texts. Malcolm X's aggressive tone and statements contending that

violence will result from delayed justice create an easy target for biased power structures. Malcolm X clearly condemns White power structures; however Malcolm X advocates for violence only when necessary for protection. Throughout *The Ballot or the Bullet*, Malcolm X contends that violence is *becoming* the only option. Pertaining to violence and weapons, he explains, “This doesn't mean you're going to get a rifle and form battalions and go out looking for white folks, although you'd be within your rights -- I mean, you'd be justified; but that would be illegal and we don't do anything illegal. If the white man doesn't want the black man buying rifles and shotguns, then let the government do its job” (Ballot or the Bullet). Evidenced by his autobiography, Malcolm X's perspective of unifying the country changes greatly after his conversion to true Islam. Both of his texts reveal that he is not indiscriminately violent, nor does he advocate for violence unless it is in direct response to violence.

Also, as aforementioned, when utilizing New Historicism to posit Malcolm X's theories, it is apparent that the media overemphasizes his aggression and downplays his ideological changes that follow his second conversion. Malcolm X views America as unfair and imbalanced; he argues that African Americans “have made a greater contribution and have collected less. Civil rights, for those of us whose philosophy is black nationalism, means: ‘Give it to us now. Don't wait for next year. Give it to us yesterday, and that's not fast enough’” (Ballot or the Bullet). Malcolm X, like the other authors, realizes he has to use the media to garner attention. While all of the authors utilize this tool, they all differ in their tactics for and utilization of attracting media attention.

Similarly, all of the authors desire voice and mobility for subalterns; however, they all differ in their specific methods and scope: West and Malcolm X's views narrow to African American subalterns while King and Obama's encompass a larger scope. The leaders differ here.

King and Obama desire to aid all subalterns while West and Malcolm X have a much stronger focus on African American subalterns. To accomplish these goals, in part, they utilize media structures. West's recording of a hip-hop album is, of course, outlandish and unprecedented in the eyes of his Harvard administration; Malcolm X's already extreme, and possibly hyperbolic, statements are misused and taken out of context; both Obama and King are unfairly viewed by their opponents due to misquoting from media sources. The differences between the men are present and important, as they are with all people. What is pertinent, to me and this study, are the authors' similarities in searching for voice and possibility for subalterns. Religion's influence and power unifies the authors and is area of congruence that the succeeding chapter discusses.

Like media misrepresentation, noticing the influence of religion upon the leaders is unavoidable, especially when trying to posit the authors into their time periods. For all of the authors, religion was a quintessential lens through which they viewed the world and, especially, the world's disadvantaged. Malcolm X's autobiography, ironically as he was the only Muslim, presents a microcosm of the authors' religious actions and ideologies. Malcolm X's life microcosmically displays the change in voice and mobility that the authors believe spirituality brings.

For Malcolm X, spirituality was essential and transformative. According to New Historicism, the historical time period into which a person is born and the culture present in that person's environment is paramount; however, Malcolm X's life shows that subalterns' lives are not solely shaped by the circumstances in which people find themselves, but also the spiritual predicaments to which they expose themselves. With the help of God, people can change their predicaments and forge a different perspective of their world, history, and environment. This is captured well by Malcolm X in his autobiography as he states, "Mankind's history has proved

from one era to another that the true criterion of leadership is spiritual. Men are attracted by spirit. By power, men are *forced*. Love is engendered by spirit. By power, anxieties are created” (376). Similar to New Historicists in acknowledging how circumstances shape behavior and belief systems, but contrasting in the magnification of the spiritual, Malcolm X’s life of changes microcosmically displays that actions and belief systems are inextricably linked.

This chapter outlines pivotal events that shape the authors’ perspectives toward disadvantaged African Americans, and then establishes that disparaging media practices aid hegemonic image appropriation, which aids the relegation of disadvantaged groups to the status of subaltern. The following chapter will investigate the role of Christianity in creating such strong nihilism in the minds of the disadvantaged that they are appropriated to the status of subaltern.

Chapter Two: For the Love of God

“I am certain we need to pray for God’s help and guidance in this integration struggle, but we are gravely misled if we think the struggle will be won only by prayer. God, who gave us minds for thinking and bodies for working, would defeat his own purpose if he permitted us to obtain through prayer what may come through work and intelligence. Prayer is a marvelous and necessary supplement of our feeble efforts, but it is a dangerous substitute” (King, *Strength to Love*, 132-3).

A free bird leaps
on the back of the wind
and floats downstream
till the current ends
and dips his wing
in the orange sun rays
and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks
down his narrow cage
can seldom see through
his bars of rage
his wings are clipped and
his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing. (Angelou, “Caged Bird”)

Malcolm X, King, Obama, and West are all followers of a religious faith, which guides their ideologies and actions toward African American subalterns. All four authors sacrifice and confront injustice due to their religious convictions; they also appreciate of America’s religious possibilities despite the historic hegemonic corrupt practices as religion can bring positive progress for all Americans who are willing to accept equality. Malcolm X, King, Obama, and West all believe that aiding the subalterns of the black community will require an acknowledgement of not only religion’s role in shaping our ideologies and the positive impacts religion can have, but also acknowledging the failures of the American Christian church. They contend that religion is empowering and brings equality. Because of this, religion is one of their means and their desired ends.

I begin the chapter by briefly explaining each authors' religious beliefs and then I examine how Spivak's subaltern theories and New Historicism apply to the authors' discussions of religion in a postcolonial American society. This chapter's main contention is that the foils similarly contend that spirituality is powerful and should be utilized to engender positive changes; moreover, all claim that a postcolonial America skews Christianity in two ways: hypocritical and anaesthetizing Christianity. After introducing the ideas of hypocritical and anaesthetizing Christianity, this chapter reveals how each author explicitly discusses these two fallacies. To close, I examine how the authors contrast, especially Malcolm X.

King, a Christian minister of the group, boasts that his life is a meaningless shamle without the power and purpose derived from his spirituality. Much of what is known about King's ideologies comes directly from his religious sermons, speeches, and letters. Based upon the selected texts, King, by far, makes the most direct references to spirituality for no purpose other than the edification of the concerned spiritual premise (Strength to Love). King edifies the idea that all of the authors imply: religion is not a means to another end; religion is the means and the end.

Though similar in many ideologies and in being a minister, Malcolm X contrasts King in religion as Malcolm X is the only Muslim out of the selected authors. Malcolm X's life and faith journeys are fraught with change. His initial conversion to Nation of Islam while incarcerated contrasts the other authors' conversion experiences. Moreover, these initial experiences instill mentalities that contrasts King's belief that humility is paramount; his initial religious beliefs also contrasted the other authors' desires for equality. However, after Malcolm X's trip to Mecca, he changes to become more similar to the other authors as he reveals a desire for religious and racial equality if sought by all parties involved. Malcolm X attributes his repentant

humility and eagerness of mind to his discontent with hegemonic practices and his religious conversion, which creates his impactful resilience and determination. Like King, Malcolm X attributes his positive and progressive ideologies to his spirituality, first to the Nation of Islam and then to a more pure form of Islam (Autobiography).

Though in a much different environment, the beginning of Obama's religious journey is similar to Malcolm X's. Both begin later in their lives and are, in part, public experiences of fallacious and interminable scrutiny by their opponents. Obama's Christian faith, like the other authors' faiths, solidifies his goals and gives both verbiage and reference for his beliefs. Obama believes his desire for unity, equality, and progress were all prevenient to his conversion and intentionally placed by God (*Audacity of Hope*). Obama states he has an "obligation, not only as an elected official in a pluralistic society but also as a Christian" to utilize Socratic questioning to try to ensure that he posits himself on the correct side of issues that do not exclude either allegiant's responsibility (*Audacity of Hope* 223). This obligation to balance religion and politics contrasts to Malcolm X and King who state they are primarily concerned with spreading the messages of their religion, which will improve life for African American subalterns.

West's understanding of Christianity shares similarities to Obama and the other authors. According to West, his faith necessitates Socratic questioning and the difficult task of strong humility. West and Obama both try to find an appropriate balance of faith while still supporting freedoms guaranteed in America's pluralistic society. Like Obama, West extensively discusses the need to unify with other religions to bring about desired changes. West contends that change is best accomplished through religion's power, and by entering into and working with—not just for—disadvantaged communities; Jesus practiced and preached a social gospel and did not avoid

subalterns, West attempts the same, which has caused some to scrutinize and criticize him (*Democracy Matters*). All of the authors attribute their passion and ideologies to their faith.

Spivak's postcolonial theories concerning subalterns is applicable to the authors' connecting of religion to the plight of poor and intentionally disadvantaged African Americans. Spivak does not directly mention Islam or Christianity's roles in aiding subalterns in *Can the Subaltern Speak?*; but, while she critiques other theorists, she contends that intellectuals must "attempt to disclose and know the discourse of society's Other" (66). In the opinion of the authors, a humble and uncontaminated practicing of religion will improve the intellectuals' effectiveness; when God is aiding, citizens can better shed ignorance to continue the "criticism coming out of the West today [which] is the result of an interested desire to conserve the subject of the West, or the West as Subject" (Spivak, 66). Spivak, like the four authors, believes that imperialism in any form has created a "palimpsestic narrative" in which the power structures' knowledge and understandings are viewed as superior. According to all four authors, leaders who remove the palimpsestic to truly and humbly follow a religious faith can break the recursive oppression of African American subalterns; subalterns will find unexpected and enigmatic strength by doing the same.

For this study, I contend that there are two main skewed or palimpsestic versions of Christianity the authors condemn. The first is hypocritical Christianity, namely a white-supremacist version that allows racial prejudice to override Biblical doctrine; the second is anaesthetizing Christianity in which Christians, especially whites and middle class African Americans, believe that comfort equates to God's blessing, alleviating them from confronting social injustices and engaging the disadvantaged. Both groups feel removed from the oppressed due, in part, to their beliefs of racial or economic superiority. The authors all imply that African

American subalterns are more psychologically and emotionally enraged by white supremacist Christianity, but that version is not necessarily more pervasive or perverse than anaesthetizing Christianity.

In *Strength to Love*, King states, “One of the shameful tragedies of history is that the very institution which should remove man from the midnight of racial segregation participates in creating and perpetuating the midnight” (61). White supremacist Christianity and anaesthetizing Christianity are opponents of progressive change for subalterns. Spivak’s notion of imperialistic forces creating subalterns applies well to the authors’ claims against skewed forms of Christianity. Though false Christianity has and does silence subalterns, pure religious devotion creates an alternative perspective through which subalterns and those in power can see their external realities. Hypocritical white supremacist Christianity is most extensively discussed by Malcolm X, but all of the authors discuss the dangers of skewing the words of the Bible to justify this heinous ideology.

Anaesthetizing Christianity is mostly discussed by the authors as a perpetrator of subjugation; it is a force that pacifies the able and enables the marginalization of subalterns. This occurs in two ways: by relating to the affluent and powerful that their status warrants unconcern with the plight of the marginalized, and its encouraging marginalized groups to ignore injustices due to the promise of a better eternal afterlife. Pacifying Christianity increases the silencing of “the margins (one can just as well say the silent, silenced center) of the circuit marked out by this [figurative and literal] epistemic violence, men and women among the illiterate peasantry, the tribals, the lowest strata of the urban subproletariat” (Spivak 78). Though Spivak and the authors possibly differ—the exclusion of information can intimate belief—on religious specificity and

religion's role, they agree on a unified, intelligent, and impassioned force that desires liberation for groups of subalterns.

Anaesthetizing Christianity skews perspectives and, thereby, suppresses discontent and dissent; it pacifies potentially aroused groups. As Malcolm X states in his autobiography “only guilt admitted accepts truth. The Bible again: the one people whom Jesus could not help were the Pharisees; they didn't feel they needed any help. The very enormity of my previous life's guilt prepared me to accept the truth” (167). Malcolm X, himself, was a subaltern who utilized religion as a means for change. In striking situational irony, Malcolm X overcomes the encompassing subjugation of African American subalterns; he does so in a prison cell, which he states is intentionally designed to perpetuate subalterns' recursive poverty and self-degradation (*Autobiography*).

Like Spivak's theories, New Historicism is concerned with the interaction of political and cultural forces. New Historicists contend that cultural power is influential. Obama, West, Malcolm X, and King believe that cultural powers, primarily religious powers and their accompanying mindsets, are as influential as political power, perhaps more influential. Just as the authors are bound to the society in which they are encumbered, so are the subalterns they desire to uplift; both subalterns and the authors' internal realities and their understandings of their present are bound to the external realities in which they live.

In *The Routledge Companion to Historical Studies*, Alun Monslow states “New historicism is characterized by the literary critic's awareness of the historical traditions of literary criticism and how changes in its methods have *in the past* served special interests – like those of white, middle class males, or the forces of imperialism” (142). Whether implied or explicitly stated, the authors all claim that Americans can utilize the Bible and/or the Quran as source of

cultural perspective and form of criticism, and that this will bring awareness of how the past has shaped internal and external realities. According to the four authors, not only can religion allow every citizen to better understand their immediate reality—that which they see on a regular basis—but it can also reveal historical truths.

Religion can also help subalterns and non-subalterns better understand and rectify the continuation of racist abuses, especially those directed toward the margins. However, propagandizing through and for religion, and utilizing religion as a primary cultural lens in America, has been both positive and negative. Subalterns in America have borne inequitable portions of the negative effects of propagandized religion. These propagandized forms, according to the authors, are white supremacist Christianity, and anaesthetizing Christianity.

Subversion is a key New Historicism concept that also occurs throughout the selected texts. It is particularly important when investigating the authors' opinions of religions' role:

In Greenblatt's terms, there is "no end of subversion" of power relations if we adopt the perspective of the historian and look at configurations of power other than the ones in which we find ourselves. But there is no subversion "for us," because our subjectivity is a product of the particular cultural power that in reality fashions each of us, however tenacious the illusion that we fashion ourselves may be. Any subversion of that power configuration by "us"—and ultimately this means by any human subject or group of subjects—can thus only reinforce it. (458-9)

The authors all claim that our reality is, and has been for hundreds of years, subverted by authorities that have conflated religion and imperialist goals in attempts to maintain power dynamics in the realms of religion, politics, economics, social structures, and the academe. Reflecting upon the failures of Christianity is the best way to ensure Christians avoid ignoring subalterns. The authors do not discuss the notion of religion being able to provide ultimate cultural understanding. Nor does religion have the ability to *fashion* an absolutely accurate perspective of our present reality: discriminatory subversion has occurred for too long.

According to the authors, an accurate religious perspective provides a better understanding of present circumstances. Actual religious texts not culturally injected misrepresentations inform an accurate perspective.

The authors' main claims are that religion expedites change, and it can provide a lasting change because it is not simply a superficial, legislated, or temporary change, but rather a change in perspective. New Historicism and Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak?* both reveal a recurring theme mentioned by all four authors, "Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed" (King, *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*). The authors believe that authentic religion provides the best option for timely and lasting. Religion is the means and the end: a means to demanding freedom and voice for subalterns, and an end for power and Truth for all people.

Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak?* and New Historicism provide an adequate perspective from which to view the texts' discussions of religious purpose and power; just as these two theories provide perspective of the texts, the authors believe that faith and religious texts can provide subalterns with an adequate view of their immediate realities. According to the authors, both subalterns and non-subalterns can better understand and change their immediate realities by utilizing the lens of Christ or Muhammad, which provides a truer and uncontaminated perspective of hope instead of false self-degradation and nihilism.

All four leaders passionately agree: the American Christian church has failed African American subalterns due to the spreading of hypocritical Christianity and anaesthetizing Christianity. The first focuses on intentionally skewing Christ's message while latter focuses on comfort instead of conviction. Though their verbiage differs some, the authors believe that the American Christian Church has and does not live up to Jesus' commands; this is the essential

common ground for the authors, especially King and Malcolm X. King, in *Strength to Love*, summarizes his and his foil's feelings well:

Called to be the moral guardian of the community, the church at times has preserved that which is immoral and unethical. Called to combat social evils, it has remained silent behind stained-glass windows. Called to lead men on the highway of brotherhood and to summon them to rise above the narrow confines of race and class, it has enunciated and practised racial exclusiveness. (21)

Exclusiveness is spread through pacification. King feels that race and class are narrow confines that society uses to subjugate then perpetuate subjugation, and that the Church fails its duty to provide freedom from this confinement. King claims that materialism and desires to retain parishioners causes pastors to preach comfort and complacency rather than true Christianity. Obama, Malcolm X, West, and King all condemn this anaesthetizing Christianity in at least one of their selected works.

Throughout *Dreams from My Father*, Obama reveals that too many churches and pastors ignore the poor. Obama's boss, who is particularly insightful for Obama as he begins his community activism work, states, "Churches won't work with you, though, just out of the goodness of their hearts. They'll talk a good game—a sermon on Sunday, maybe, or a special offering for the homeless. But if push comes to shove, they won't really move unless you can show them how it'll help them pay their heating bill" (141). King discusses this as well, stating preachers purport comfort rather than seek righteous conviction in order to not "disturb the respectable views of the comfortable members of [their] congregations" (*Strength to Love*, 21). King further elaborates on this, stating, "Nothing in all the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity" (*Strength to Love* 43). This ignorance and stupidity perpetuates subalterns' status because Christian preachers pacify parishioners.

Obama includes another conversation *Dreams from My Father* that reveals pacification. As he is trying to mobilize local churches to combat social injustices; an inflamed passionate pastor contends, “A lot of black folks in the church get mixed up in middle-class attitudes ... They figure they’re comfortable, so why put themselves out. Well, Christ ain’t about comfort, is he? He preached a social gospel. Took his message to the weak. The downtrodden. And that’s exactly what I tell some of these middle-class Negroes whenever I stand up on Sunday” (153). Throughout *Dreams from My Father* Obama reveals that too many middle class African Americans focus on being comfortable rather than following Christ’s social gospel.

Obama claims that wealthy Christians, both in his organizing days and presently, hesitate to volunteer their time for anything that might risk their security, image, or “keep them in the city after dark” (*Dreams from My Father* 273). The church is able to break this cycle, but too many pastors preach comforting sermons to keep their lights on, or to maintain a façade of respectability instead of attempting to awaken their communities. King captures Obama’s frustrations well as he argues, “If the church does not participate actively in the struggle for peace and for economic and racial justice, it will forfeit the loyalty of millions and cause men everywhere to say that it has atrophied its will” (*Strength to Love* 62). Atrophy creates avarice and an avoidance of confrontation; this pacifies and, consequently, perpetuates the status of African American subalterns.

Anaesthetizing Christianity prolongs suffering as it pacifies and ignores injustices. King, Malcolm X, West, and Obama intentionally insert themselves into the tumult of racial strife, so they understand the narrow confines of race from firsthand experience. As King was facing prison’s narrow confines for peacefully protesting, he ponders this idea of an anaesthetizing Christianity. King, while an adamant pacifist in terms of modern warfare, adamantly criticizes

preaching a pacifying Christianity. To King, pacification is the enemy and religion must not wait on social change because “time is neutral”; and, it is up to the Church “to make real the promise of democracy and transform our pending national elegy into a creative psalm of brotherhood. Now is the time to lift our national policy from the quicksand of racial injustice to the solid rock of human dignity” (*Letter from a Birmingham Jail*). Instead of unification that uplifts, the church has anaesthetized parishioners and remained silent with too few men willing to engage in frontline struggles as Jesus did.

West also discusses the dangers of anaesthetizing Christianity and the evils of Christian silence. Though a Christian himself, West advocates improvement will come from a prophetic framework that allows for Socratic questioning with those of other religions. Socratic questioning can disturb comfort, which, he contends, will disrupt the church’s ignoring the poor. This includes discussing other religions’ ideas, and including other religions in creating positive change. This unification creates change because “a prophetic framework encourages *moral* assessment of the variety of perspectives held by black people and selects those views based on black dignity and decency that eschew putting any group of people or culture on a pedestal or in the gutter” (*Race Matters* 43). West, like Obama, uses Socratic questioning of his own beliefs and advocates for interfaith synergy.

West mentions this need for unity in *Democracy Matters*. He states that American imperialism creates national and international subalterns, which prophetic witnesses, like King and Malcolm X, must confront. He contends, “This prophetic commitment to justice is foundational in both Christianity and Islam. The gospel of love taught by Jesus and the message of mercy of Muhammad both build on the Jewish invention of the prophetic love of justice” (19). West then continues to advocate interfaith synergy, especially to aid the oppressed and repressed.

These bold beliefs confront injustices and are the best tool “against the callous indifference of the plutocratic elites of the American empire” (19).

Like West, Obama and King also mention the impacts of anaesthetizing Christianity, which they criticize for creating moral pacifists. In *Strength to Love*, King advocates for a strength of mind similar to Socratic questioning, in which the church remembers its primary purposes and informs communities that, “Man is no helpless invalid left in a valley of total depravity until God pulls him out. Man is rather an upstanding human being whose vision has been impaired by the cataracts of sin and whose soul has been weakened by the virus of pride ... The belief that God will do everything for men is as untenable as the belief that man can do everything for himself” (133). Obama reveals that applying Christ’s principles of bold love and confronting injustice must engage both body and mind:

Religious commitment did not require me to suspend critical thinking, disengage from the battle for economic and social justice, or otherwise retreat from the world that I knew and loved ... [Baptism] came about as a choice and not an epiphany; the questions I had did not magically disappear. But kneeling beneath that cross on the South Side of Chicago, I felt God’s spirit beckoning me. I submitted myself to his will, and dedicated myself to discovering His truth (208).

Obama, like King and West, argues that churches must awaken their congregations to confront injustice, which will provide subaltern communities with emboldened passion and emboldened leaders; chapter four analyzes the latter notion. These three authors focus mainly on Christian churches’ present failures and the steps leaders should take to rectify the mistakes.

Malcolm X also discusses that too many Christians are focused on comfort; but, by contrast, he focuses more on the hypocrisy of both the 1960s Christian church and the historical American Christian church. Instead of an anaesthetizing pacifism, Malcolm X’s dialectics focus on the hypocritical failures of the historical and present Christian churches. New historicists would contend he does so because Christianity’s hypocrisy is what Malcolm X experiences in his

early external reality. King, West, and Obama believe that anaesthetizing Christianity creates pacification, which perpetuates hypocritical behavior; being active in Christian churches, they hear the dissemination of doctrines pacifying Christ's commands. Malcolm X, though, views Christianity from an outsider's perspective, so he places more blame for the social evils he views on the white race's, or imperialism's, corruption of Christianity and less on the messages and attitudes within the present Christian churches. He, like King, proclaims that Christianity creates crumbling neighborhoods. This feeds Malcolm X's earlier nihilistic mentalities; the difference arises in who and what each author blames: King blames all races and moral pacification, Malcolm X blames the white race and weak-willed hypocrisy (*Strength to Love*) (Autobiography).

It is important to predicate a discussion of Malcolm X's discussions of Christianity to include that he is not a blind opponent of Christianity or Christian ministers. In his famous speech, "*The Ballot or the Bullet*," he begins by praising the work of three Christian ministers and then states, "I believe in action on all fronts by whatever means necessary" (Ballot or the Bullet). It is also pertinent to note that this speech was given one month after Malcolm's split with the Nation of Islam. At this point, he begins to consider the long term ramifications of separatism and violence; he states "if we don't cast a ballot, it's going to end up in a situation where we're going to *have* to cast a bullet. It's either a ballot or a bullet" (Ballot or the Bullet). Though he still contends he wishes a black nation's establishment, he also desires the dominant group to address disparities and seek equality and unification. Malcolm X does not desire violence, but he realizes that violence will occur if changes are not engendered. Malcolm X desires justice and equality. Where he differs from King, West, and Obama is that he believes violence is inevitable and justified if injustice does not change. Malcolm X is willing to avoid

violence: it is the ballot *or* the bullet, not the ballot *and* the bullet. Malcolm's mentalities change as does his willingness to synergize with Christians.

While all of the leaders' discuss their disappointment with the historical American Christian church, it is a main focus for Malcolm X. Malcolm X's love of Islam and disdain of hypocritical Christianity seems to directly correlate with the unjust historical circumstances into which he was thrust. While Malcolm X has been misrepresented and unfairly condemned for his hatred of Christianity, it is not Christ or Christianity that frustrates Malcolm X. Hypocritical Christianity, especially a white supremacist form Christianity that is distorted to subjugate black subalterns and increase white wealth, causes Malcolm X's frustrations. As stated in his autobiography, "The black man needs to reflect that he has been America's most fervent Christian –and where has it gotten him? In fact, in the white man's hands, in the white man's interpretation . . . where has Christianity brought this *world*? . . . Only one religion –Islam— had the power to stand and fight the white man's Christianity for a *thousand years!*" (376). Though he focuses on this more than the other three, Malcolm X is not alone in his condemnation of hypocritical Christianity

West states that Malcolm X's misunderstanding of Christianity comes from misrepresentation. For Malcolm X, Christians are the antithesis of loving humility that uplifts the vulnerable. It is because of this that Malcolm X so vehemently opposes Christianity during his years as a Nation of Islam minister. West explains that Malcolm X's love for subalterns is predicated on his spiritual beliefs just as King's are: there is a God who cares for subalterns and is angered by their mistreatment. In *Race Matters*, West discusses the justified rage:

“[Malcolm X's] love as neither abstract nor ephemeral. Rather, it was a concrete connection with a degraded and devalued people in need of psychic conversion. This is why Malcolm X's articulation of black rage was not directed first and foremost at white America. Rather, Malcolm X believed that if black people felt the love that motivated

that rage, the love would produce a psychic conversion in black people; they would affirm themselves as human beings, no longer viewing their bodies, minds, and souls through white lenses, and believing themselves capable of taking control of their own destinies” (136).

According to West Malcolm X’s anger and passion are both justified, not solely his passion; Obama also appreciates these sentiments, which he discusses in *Dreams from My Father*, “[Malcolm X’s] repeated acts of self-creation spoke to me; the blunt poetry of his words, his unadorned insistence on respect, promised a new and uncompromising order, martial in its discipline, forged through sheer force of will” (86). All of the authors—including King who is misrepresented and falsely historicized as sheepish—passionately condemn skewed forms of Christianity.

Obama, West, and King disdain anaesthetizing Christianity, which Malcolm X supports by insisting Christians act like Jesus Christ. Malcolm X explicitly condemns hypocritical Christianity; the other three authors imply that pacification causes hypocrisy. Malcolm X addresses university audiences, questioning the historicized renditions of white supremacy and its accompanying inhumane treatments. Malcolm X contends that Christianity scars the identities of disadvantaged African Americans, and it systematically suppresses subalterns. To a university audience, Malcolm X states, “The collective white man’s history ... [shows how] he tries, characteristically, to cover up his past record. He does not possess the humility to admit his guilt, to try and atone for his crimes. The white man has perverted the simple message of love that the Prophet Jesus lived and taught when He walked upon this earth” (291). Malcolm X’s words are strikingly similar to the other three leaders; what is subtly different is the sole focus on hypocrisy.

Similarly, Malcolm X discusses hypocritical Christianity with reporters who are trying to attain controversial headlines. Malcolm X, though knowing what they were doing, responds to

these “breathing, living devils” with “fire,” and he argues, “The Holy Bible in the white man’s hands and his interpretations of it have been the greatest single ideological weapon for enslaving millions of non-white human beings. Every country the white man has conquered with his guns, he has always paved the way , and salved his conscience, by carrying the Bible and interpreting it to call ... his missionaries behind to mop up” (245) (246). With a New Historicist lens and Malcolm X’s own intimations in his autobiography, it is apparent that Malcolm X’s anger associates American historical Christianity to present injustices toward subalterns. The other authors have differing life experiences and environments, so they view the injustices as having a root cause of pacifying Christianity that creates hypocrisy.

Religion’s positive and negative role in race relations is an integral theme interspersed throughout each of the authors’ selected texts. The leaders all view racial matters through a spiritual lens and believe that the two are inextricable due to America’s precarious religious history. West believes that hypocritical racist Christianity stems from pacification that has created a lack of spirituality. The accompanying immorality directly contributes to perpetuating of subalterns’ statuses; impoverished African Americans are no longer concerned with advancement but with fleeting temporary pleasures that provide no real substance or sustenance for mind, body, or spirit. West believes this was intentionally designed by white supremacists. In *Race Matters*, West claims this spiritual vacuum creates a perpetual cycle of poverty and nihilism:

And a pervasive spiritual impoverishment grows. The collapse of meaning in life—the eclipse of hope and absence of love of self and others, the breakdown of family and neighborhood bonds—leads to the social deracination and cultural denudement of urban dwellers, especially children. We have created rootless, dangling people with little link to the supportive networks –family, friends, school –that sustain some sense of purpose in life. We have witnessed the collapse of the spiritual communities that in the past helped Americans face despair, disease, and death and that transmit through the generations dignity and decency, excellence and elegance (9-10).

West decries the Christian churches' failures, as do the other authors.

Malcolm X contrasts in that he does not understand why African Americans view Christianity favorably; Christians have committed inhumane racist atrocities, which they justified partially through religion. In an "extemporaneous lecture" after his incarceration ended, Malcolm X rails that "our white slavemaster's Christian religion has ... brainwashed us black people" to accept abuse, degradation, and hatred (Autobiography 204-5). All of the leaders display frustrations with white supremacist Christianity, but Malcolm X has a stronger focus on passionately disseminating his newfound understanding of American history, ensuring that none ignore African American subalterns' suffering. Though not a primary focus, the four authors all mention their anger with the racist injustices allowed or even endorsed by historical and present American Christianity; their feelings are captured well by Malcolm X in his autobiography:

This 'Negro' was taught to worship an alien God having the same blond hair, pale skin, and blue eyes as the slavemaster. The religion taught the 'Negro' that black was a curse. It taught him to hate everything black, including himself. It taught him that everything white was good, to be admired, respected, and loved. It brainwashed this 'Negro' to think he was superior if his complexion showed more of the white pollution of the slavemaster. This white man's Christian religion further deceived and brainwashed this 'Negro' to always turn the other cheek, and grin, and scrape, and bow, and be humble, and to sing, and to pray, and to take whatever was dished out by the devilish white man; and to look for his pie in the sky, and for his heaven in the hereafter, while right here on earth the slavemaster white man enjoyed *his* heaven" (166).

All four authors contend that racist ideologies were supported by a religion that should have condemned them, and are perpetuated by a force that should have hindered them. All four authors contend religion provides a means and an end: a means for social change and an end for spiritual sustenance. However, while Obama and West claim to receive power and sustenance from Christianity, they do not contend that one religion is or should be the sole executor of changes in American race relations, which Malcolm X and King both imply is possible.

King and Malcolm X are two foils advocating in their writing for an immediate removal of silencing structures such as segregation and workplace racial discrimination. While they differ, greatly, in which religion they follow and whether or not they believe their religion allows for the use of violence, the authors are strikingly similar in their views of subalterns' plights and the role of Christianity in creating and perpetuating their dire situations. Viewing these authors from the eyes of their religious opponents is pertinent here. The authors' opponents, whether aggressive through violence or opinion, seek to silence them. King reveals that his activities are seen by many middle class Christians, including African American middle class Christians, as "unwise and untimely," and that his willingness to confront injustice is too "extreme" (Letter from a Birmingham Jail).

Malcolm X's critics are similarly opined, which Malcolm X discusses extensively in his autobiography. As he espouses hidden racial and spiritual truths to college students and professors, Malcolm X claims "the white man is rare who will ever consider that a Negro can outsmart him" (148). Malcolm X, in his youth, is inundated with this psychological opposition just as he claims many subalterns still are. Later in his life, Malcolm X also faces strong opposition from the Nation of Islam. In his autobiography, Malcolm X proclaims, "In any city, wherever I go ... black men are watching every move I make, awaiting their chance to kill me. I have said publicly many times that I know that they have their orders. Anyone who chooses not to believe what I am saying doesn't know the Muslims in the Nation of Islam" (388). King's critics were just as extreme, which he relates in *Strength to Love*:

I have been imprisoned in Alabama and Georgia jails twelve times. My home has been bombed twice. A day seldom passes that my family and I are not the recipients of threats of death. I have been the victim of a near-fatal stabbing. So in a real sense I have been battered by the storms of persecution. I must admit that at times I have felt that I could no longer bear such a heavy burden, and have been tempted to retreat to a more quiet and serene life. But every time such a temptation appeared, something came to strengthen and

sustain my determination. ... There are some who still find the cross a stumbling block, but I am more convinced than ever before that it is the power of God unto social and individual salvation. (153-4).

All four authors discuss opposition and attribute their perseverance to the strength derived from spirituality. All four authors believe that supernatural strength supersedes mortal strength. They believe that both hope and evil are real, and that the confronting of the latter is best accomplished through religious means. They contend that if evil is real, so is the supernatural; if racism is a matter of conscience and not simply science, then legislating is merely a portion of the solution, and a poor solution as it is an external solution for an internal evil.

According to West, Americans are creating enemies and subalterns, which is causing vehement and violent nihilism that will eventually target American Christianity. In *Democracy Matters*, West equates the religious right's support of a war machine in the Middle East to American Christianity's historical and present perpetuating of racial injustices. Many Muslims equate American Christians to war, hatred, and self-degradation. Modern Muslims view American Christianity and democracy as distorted oppressive forces partially due to political meddling and military interventions that show "the colossal presence of the American empire in the Jewish and Islamic world" (*Democracy Matters* 141). Many Muslims may feel what King and Malcolm X insinuated in the 1960s: skewed forms of American Christianity are damaging to both the world and a true interpretation of Jesus Christ.

Christianity has been usurped by imperialists; West specifically mentions Christian fundamentalists utilizing politics to misrepresent religion similar to the historical hypocritical Christian church. This has led to "the imperial devouring of democracy in America—free-market fundamentalism, aggressive militarism, and escalating authoritarianism ... often justified by the religious rhetoric of this Christian fundamentalism" (*Democracy Matters* 146). West could likely

apply Malcolm X's quote about racial injustice throughout American history to the perspective of many in the Arab world:

I read, I saw, how the white man never has gone among the non-white peoples bearing the Cross in the true manner and spirit of Christ's teachings—meek humble, and Christ-like. I perceived, as I read, how the collective white man had been actually nothing but a piratical opportunist who used Faustian machinations to make his own Christianity his initial wedge in criminal conquests (Autobiography 180).

Modern American Christianity is reminiscent to West of a racist historical Christianity as it is creating subalterns nationally and abroad.

American Christianity must change if it is to accomplish the social gospel that Jesus Christ lived and preached. King intimates that he is extremely disappointed in the “laxity” of the church and that the church must change if it is to follow Christ's precepts:

How we have blemished and scarred [Christ's message] through social neglect and through fear of being nonconformists. There was a time when the church was very powerful—in the time when the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society. (*Letter from a Birmingham Jail*)

Malcolm X and King seem strikingly similar here as Malcolm X states “if the so-called ‘Christianity’ now being practiced in America displays the best that world Christianity has left to offer—no one in his right mind should need any much greater proof that very close at hand is the *end of Christianity*” (Autobiography 376). To the authors, disappointment with Christianity does not equal their hatred of Christianity or Christians. King claims—and the other authors' texts imply they would agree—that, “There can be no deep disappointment where there is not deep love” (Letter from a Birmingham Jail). King, Obama, West, and Malcolm X are disappointed with Christianity's past and pessimistic towards its future *if* Christians are not intentional in following Jesus Christ's message. Malcolm X's views of Christianity are more distanced and pessimistic. All authors, however, agree that faith and spirituality have been historically

detrimental but could provide the best unifying force for racial, political, and community synergy.

This chapter establishes that the foils share congruence in their disapproval of skewed Christianity. They also agree that religion can be powerful when authentic and based upon the practices of its founders. Through Socratic questioning, the authors are able to confront the palimpsestic narrative American postcolonial hegemony attempts to create through hypocritical and anaesthetizing Christianity. Despite a precarious history, the authors love the possibilities of religion just as they love America.

Chapter Three: For the Love of Country

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—

I, too, am America. (Hughes, "I, Too")

Despite America's historical oppressions of African Americans, all four authors wish for its future success. The authors primarily contend that religion is a motivating and empowering force that can help create equality between subalterns and American hegemony; accompanying this claim and its struggles, are the authors' contentions that America's political possibilities are great. However, Malcolm X, King, West, and Obama all believe America's future political success is contingent upon addressing disparities.

This chapter investigates how imperialistic mentalities create the disparities discussed in the selected texts; also detrimental, subalterns are created by a lack of engagement with disadvantaged minorities within America's borders, primarily through poor educational systems and the maldistribution of wealth through unjust business practices. Also, misguided engagement

strategies abroad through America's military systems and political influencing have further created nihilism in African American subalterns and international subalterns.

The chapter begins the same as the preceding chapter: applying the two theories to the authors' experiences and claims about American politics and culture. Following this, the chapter investigates disparaging political practices and contends they intentionally perpetuate poverty and self-degradation, creating subalterns. Despite historical colonial mentalities and the present mentalities perpetuated by postcolonialism, the authors believe America's founding documents has potential to engender equality; America's history of abiding by these guiding principles is precarious and hypocritical, but the framework has potential. Following analyzing the authors' claims that America's founding documents and people are paradoxical, ironic, and hypocritical, the chapter closes with a brief discussion of Malcolm X's beliefs about Garvey's black nationalism.

Another area of congruence comes from the authors' discussion of America's founding and founders. While all four authors mention that the founders of America, namely Thomas Jefferson, advocated for the benefits of slavery and even owned slaves themselves, they also discuss that some of these men had great potential and eventually changed their mentalities. True to their aforementioned understanding of history impacting the present, some of the authors discuss that America's founders were connected to the time period in which they lived and had to fight their own culture in order to change. New Historicism benefits this chapter as it aids the understanding of both the authors and the authors' interpretations of America's racial and political histories; New Historicism will also help analyze the authors' contention that America's racial and political histories are inextricable.

In *The New Historicism*, Aram Veesser discusses New Historicism. This text reveals that New Historicism applies well to the authors' opinions of America's tumultuous racial and political histories. Veesser contends that New Historicism theory developed from historicism and humanism; this inception comes from a desire to inspect both the details of people's daily lives and how power structures impact those lives. The authors believe that African American subalterns' lives, both in their present times and historically, are bound to their respective time periods, race relations, and political climates. Power structures impact subalterns' daily lives; but, to fully understand the subalterns, neither a distanced approach nor a approach unconcerned with macro logical occurrences are apt. Veesser reveals that New Historicism allows for a more accurate view of authors and their works because it combines the intimacy of humanism and the accuracy of historicism:

Conventional scholars—entrenched, self-absorbed, protective of guild loyalties and turf, specialized in the worst senses—have repaired to their disciplinary enclaves and committed a classic *trahison des clercs*. As the first successful counterattack in decades against this profoundly anti-intellectual ethos [of humanism], the New Historicism has given scholars new opportunities to cross the boundaries separating history, anthropology, art, politics, literature, and economics. It has struck down the doctrine of noninterference that forbade humanists to intrude on questions of politics, power, indeed on all matters that deeply affect people's practical lives—matters best left, prevailing wisdom went, to experts who could be trusted to preserve order and stability in "our" global and intellectual domains. New Historicism threatens this quasi-monastic order. (ix)

New Historicism's scope helps analyze the four authors, their selected texts, and their opinions of political and racial histories creating and continuing some African Americans' status as subalterns.

While Veesser's term treason, *trahison*, may seem extreme when referring intellectuals' failure to adequately connect historical and political powers to the daily struggle of the marginalized, both the authors and Spivak authors would likely agree with this notion. As discussed in chapter two, the failure of the Christian Church has and does contribute to the

creating and continuing of subalterns' plights. The authors condemn this behavior, calling it hypocritical and insinuating that it perpetuated evils. King and Malcolm X, though typically viewed as opposing and antagonistic, share Veese's opinion that treason is an appropriate term for those who oppose equality.

Malcolm X and King discuss the political and engagements hypocrisies that Veese calls treasons. In typical fiery passion, Malcolm X proclaims, "Don't change the white man's mind—you can't change his mind, and that whole thing about appealing to the moral conscience of America—America's conscience is bankrupt. She lost all conscience a long time ago. Uncle Sam has no conscience" (Ballot or the Bullet). Similarly, King's letter denounces this lack of morality, stating that many white parishioners and their clergy ignore Christ's calls to justice. They state King's concerns for civil rights "are social issues, with which the gospel has no real concern" (Letter from a Birmingham Jail). Throughout the letter, King implies that those people are acting illogically and hypocritically; moreover, King claims these men are inadvertently complicit with evil that necessitates Elijah Muhammad's Muslim movement, which has ideologies of "bitterness and hatred, and it comes perilously close to advocating violence" (Letter from a Birmingham Jail). The authors love African American subalterns, and will not allow unjust systems of religion or politics to subjugate or ignore them.

While the authors' love of America's possibilities is unwavering it is clearly not unquestioning. The use of Socratic questioning and uncompromising passion for the marginalized is essential to understand the authors' paradigms toward America and its future. One of the paramount issues all four men discuss is that political corruption impacts the daily lives of marginalized African Americans. This political corruption is unquestioned by the comfortable because many Americans believe the hegemonic recorded version of history, which

accepts a racist recollection of events, including the ignoring of present and historical subalterns. The authors contend that this ideologically relegates the present and historical subaltern body politic to the margins and allows the perpetuation of abuses and silencing.

Gayatri Spivak claims that the comfortable and complacent ignore subalterns, in part, because of a “palimpsestic narrative,” which proves that the hegemonic “narrative of reality was established as the normative one” (*Can the Subaltern Speak?* 76). Spivak later adds, “The education of colonial subjects complements their production in the law” (77). This false recording and teaching of history, and its accompanying pigeonholing, is especially true for Malcolm X’s experiences; his history teacher’s fallaciously retells of slavery and the freedom movement, which is followed by contentions that Malcolm X and other minorities should not pursue professional careers. If American politics are to progress, politicians must first address false narratives and their accompanying detriments.

Malcolm X, West, Obama, and King’s views of politics correlate with their views on religion, education, and labor: those in power have an obligation to the margins. In *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Spivak discusses that society’s Other is kept marginalized by political powers through systems they create. Education, both formal and informal, seems paramount to Spivak and the authors. They contend that accepted versions of truth are created by power structures and that this truth eventually becomes incontestable. For African American subalterns, these versions of truths disenfranchise and belittle. Consequently, education systems inundate youth with false epistemic knowledge that perpetuate subalterns’ status.

Spivak discusses the episteme in a way with which the authors would likely agree. She states, “I am thinking of the general nonspecialist, nonacademic population across the class spectrum, for whom the episteme operates its silent programming function. Without considering

the map of exploitation, on what grid of ‘oppression’ would they place this motley crew?” (78). The false episteme has so successfully been established that even the oppressed are not depicted as such. For example, Malcolm X’s history teacher seems oblivious that he is declaring a false version of history; he seems ignorant as he adds oppression to misinformation as he tells Malcolm X he should be “realistic” and not pursue his goal of becoming a lawyer (Autobiography 38). Spivak’s question of exploitation is similar to the Socratic questioning the authors’ desire: How oppressed does one have to be in the eyes of the American power structure to be considered oppressed? Historically, how much can America oppress a slave, segregated, or silenced African American for those with bias to consider it oppression? These questions guide the authors’ opinions of politics and the necessary steps to aiding subalterns in having their own democratic voices and capabilities of advancement.

Other areas of political dissention in which Spivak and the authors are unified are in the treatment of laborers, the relationship of the state and subject, and laws governing labor and wages. In postcolonial societies, Spivak argues that subalterns are perpetually subjugated because of, “An absence of labor laws (or a discriminatory enforcement of them), a totalitarian state (often entailed by development and modernization in the periphery), and minimal subsistence requirements on the part of the worker will ensure it” (*Can the Subaltern Speak* 83). The four authors contend that the state has an obligation to its workers, students, and rehabilitated members of society who have broken the law, especially those who work, study, or make mistakes in subaltern communities. According to the authors’ texts, America continues to ignore minority workers’ needs, which perpetuates postcolonial mentalities.

Spivak and the authors contend that there are dangers for anyone representing, or providing voice, for another group. Historically, the authors contend that African Americans

have been misrepresented, which is perhaps best stated in Malcolm X's *The Ballot or the Bullet* as Malcolm X vehemently condemns Democrats and Republicans for intentionally hindering African American communities. Though the authors believe religion's role is paramount, they also agree that politics is another key factor in the perpetuation of marginalization.

Politics should provide mobility instead of perpetuating stagnation. However, the false narrative is so well established that subjugation seems natural for both the mobile body politic and the immobile subalterns. Seen through a the lens of New Historicism, and with the aid of Gayatri Spivak, the texts and their authors contend, "For the 'true' subaltern group, whose identity is its difference, there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself" (*Can the Subaltern Speak?* 80). The subalterns likely do not even view themselves as a body politic, as voiceless, or in need of representation. Because of this unknowing, leaders must bring representation.

Spivak discusses a difficult aspect of this issue as she states "the intellectual's solution is not to abstain from representation. The problem is that the subject's itinerary has not been traced so as to offer an object of seduction to the representing intellectual" (80). However, the authors are not proponents of postcolonial thought and oppression, nor are they seduced by the idea of representation; they are critics of these postcolonial hegemonic practices and ideologies. While one can argue that they are all beneficiaries of the postcolonial society, especially Obama as a politician and West as an academic, the authors are unified in their desire to bring voice to subalterns, not to merely represent the subalterns. This evidences that they *do* have the subject's itinerary traced and at their work's forefront. Malcolm X, West, King, and Obama desire political movements that will bring representation *and* voice to subalterns. In order to provide voice and mobility to African American subalterns, Americans must engender change in areas

such as labor and wealth distribution practices that create wealth inequality, and in ineffective and irrelevant educational systems that disallow mobility.

While chapter four will discuss aspects of labor and education as they relate to the individual advancement of disenfranchised African Americans, the authors also contend there is a political component to these areas. West summarizes this well in *Democracy Matters* as he questions liberalism and the Democratic Party's true intentions. West argues that Democrats are "impotent" in their unwillingness to confront Republicans on issues of injustice as well, and they are indulging in the rampant elitism encumbering politics (34-35). King, Malcolm X, Obama, and West all contend that both major political parties are seemingly apathetic toward these paramount issues of wealth distribution and providing meaningful work and education that allows advancement.

In order to advance and attain voice, the authors believe that subalterns need access to quality education that presents an accurate recording of history and will make them competitive in America's globalized economy. Future success for all Americans is contingent upon the success of its education systems. The authors report that education—and other aforementioned issues such as media and religion—is an unfortunate victim of political agendas; historically, education for subalterns has suffered due to the racist ideologies of politicians.

The authors all share similar sentiments to West as he states, "The tragic plight of our children clearly reveals our deep disregard for public well-being" (*Race Matters* 12). West goes on to discuss the lack of attention given to inner city schools and children. Obama also discusses this in the *Audacity of Hope*. He deplores the idea that African American children, due to the decline of blue collar jobs historically worked by their families, are stuck in cyclical poverty because they are relegated to "schools that fail to teach ... the skills they need to compete in a

global economy” (245). Obama goes on to state that some political programs like affirmative action are important but detract from what should be America’s main focus: mobility will come through opportunity, the foundation of which is education.

While programs like affirmative action and tax credits absolutely have their place, Obama contends that to truly help subaltern minorities “we should consider spending a lot more of our political capital convincing America to make the investments needed to ensure that all children perform at grade level and graduate from high school—a goal that, if met, would do more than affirmative action to help” (*The Audacity of Hope* 246). Schools in the American education system relegate impoverished children to cyclical poverty and self-degradation. If these children come from a community in which nihilism is rampant and opportunities are already seemingly non-existent, cyclical nihilism occurs, creating more subalterns.

Malcolm X’s personal experiences depict this nihilism, which West discusses extensively in both of his selected texts. Malcolm X implies that he fortunately attends a school in which high expectations and achievement are the norm. Unfortunately, when he exceeds these expectations, his efforts are viewed through racist paternalistic eyes that do not give Malcolm X the respect and opportunities his accomplishments deserve. As a result, he mentally and emotionally withdraws. He states that, though he is better equipped and more intelligent than his white classmates, they are encouraged to succeed and he is not. They are all encouraged, Malcolm X recalls, “Yet none of them had earned marks equal to mine ... I was smarter than nearly all of those white kids. But apparently I was still not intelligent enough, in their eyes to become whatever *I* wanted to be. It was then that I began to change—inside” (*Autobiography* 38). In his autobiography, Malcolm X implies that his criminal behavior would likely have been avoided if his teachers would have encouraged him use his intelligence and become a lawyer.

In *Race Matters*, West states troubled youth in disadvantaged communities can avoid the same criminal behavior in which Malcolm X engages. He argues that failing to improve education and job opportunities for disadvantaged African Americans who are surrounded by nihilism is unacceptable. Continuing the current failing systems will not “promote self-reliance or strong black families but will only produce even more black cultural disorientation and more devastated black households. This is so because without jobs or incentives to be productive citizens the black poor become even more prone toward criminality, drugs, and alcoholism—the major immediate symptoms of the pervasive black communal and cultural chaos” (*Race Matters* 86). Like West, Malcolm X advocates that all people desire self-reliance and to make worthwhile contributions if they feel as if they are an equal member of society.

King takes this claim a little farther than West by implying that the perpetrators of this injustice are not worshipping the same God as him. In his *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, King proclaims that a lack of opportunity for African American youth, including the desegregation of schools—especially religious schools—is antithetical to Christianity. King and Malcolm X, again, find much common ground when discussing hypocrisy. Like the other authors, King states that too many people in places of power are concerned with image over substance. He ponders this idea in a somewhat accusatory tone, “I have looked at the South's beautiful churches with their lofty spires pointing heavenward. I have beheld the impressive outlines of her massive religious education buildings. Over and over I have found myself asking: ‘What kind of people worship here? Who is their God?’” (*Letter from a Birmingham Jail*). Education is an essential aspect of providing voice and mobility to subalterns, but opportunities to receive a job and fair wage must accompany education.

West contends that periods of wage equity create periods of economic growth for all. When disparities are reduced, so is crime, government need for financial intervention, and a debilitating sense of despair from the less fortunate. Affirmative action, according to West, was a good initial step in engendering equality and reducing self-deprecation in subalterns. He argues that reducing wage gaps is the next. Just as Obama states that affirmative action is an essential but inadequate solution, West claims that stronger measures must bolster affirmative action to lift subalterns from the voiceless margins of American disenfranchisement. He states that affirmative action “is part of a redistributive chain that must be strengthened if we are to confront and eliminate black poverty. If there were social democratic redistributive measure that wiped out black poverty, and if racial and sexual discrimination could be abated through the good will and meritorious judgments of those in power, affirmative action would be unnecessary” (*Race Matters* 96). Avoiding government intervention is ideal; however, history and West’s present observances reveal that, like freedom, equality must be demanded by the oppressed. Along with this redistributive chain of opportunity, comes the idea that the government should protect workers from disparaging practices.

Obama discusses these practices in both of his selected texts. In the *Audacity of Hope*, Obama reveals that there are ideological threats that perpetuate mentalities that the races are not equal. For example, a friend tells Obama of a recent experience at a “private club” that informally does not allow African Americans to join (239). Obama believes that these mentalities create environments in which employers think it morally right and advantageous to pay workers less. Another area of concern he discusses in *The Audacity of Hope* is that the wage gap contributes to an enormous gap in overall financial net worth:

And yet, for all the progress that’s been made in the past four decades, a stubborn gap remains between the living standards of black, Latino, and white workers. The average

black wage is 75 percent of the average white wage; the average Latino wage is 71 percent of the average white wage. Black median net worth is about \$6,000, and Latino median net worth is about \$8,000, compared to \$88,000 for whites” (243).

Obama goes on to agree with West, stating that the civil rights movement is “unfinished business” that must be addressed (243). America must create environments in which disadvantaged minorities may advance through both relevant and rigorous education and meaningful work that provides an adequate and equal wage when compared to white workers.

Dreams from My Father also reveals Obama’s opinion of the government’s role in ensuring fair wage and labor practices. Obama reveals that he, like the other authors, desires the easing of subalterns’ plights through pride-instilling living-wage employment. Obama’s attempt to bring jobs into impoverished Chicago neighborhoods depicts his persistence and desire to increase access to employment for African Americans. Obama differs from West and Malcolm X in his scope. Obama’s texts encumber a broader scope, contending that that *all* subalterns, not just African American subalterns, need access to adequate paying gainful employment. Through his trip to Kenya and his half-brother, Bernard, he understands that all humanity is interconnected:

And what about Bernard—should my feelings for him somehow be different now? I looked over at a bus stop, where a crowd of young men were streaming out into the road, all of them tall and black and slender, their bones pressing against their shirts. I suddenly imagined Bernard’s face on all of them, multiplied across the landscape, across continents. Hungry, striving, desperate men, all of them my brothers. (336)

Obama is candid about this desperation and blames it, mainly, on the intrusion of white Europeans upon his black Kenyan family members. He contends that the last time of true meaningful work for the majority of Kenya’s population was “before the white man came. Each family had their own compound, but they all lived under the laws of the elders” (396). Obama continues, stating that the men had work as did the women, the children learned alongside their

parents, and “the words of the elders were law and strictly followed—those who disobeyed would have to leave and start anew in another village” (396). Through both texts, Obama implies that American politicians and the body politic have to decide what they believe. Do Americans believe, like Malcolm X’s history teacher, that an entire group of people is inherently lazy; or, do Americans believe that a person’s nihilistic environment creates subalterns who have hopelessness etched into their beliefs about themselves and their country?

Like Obama, King believes that too many African Americans are hopeless due to the weight of oppression that comes from degrading or sparse work opportunities. While King is associated primarily—through his selected texts and from the other authors’ referencing him—with the civil rights struggle and segregation, King discusses numerous topics, including labor and wage disparities. King is discussing disparaging business practices as he states, “We must be careful at this point not to engage in a superficial optimism or to conclude that the death of a particular evil means that all evil lies dead upon the seashore. All progress is precarious and the solution of one problem brings us face to face with another problem” (*Strength to Love* 82). Similar to Malcolm X’s intimation that whites would allow him to be *with* them but not *of* them, King claims the same of racist whites, especially those who are not poor. He states that giving money is not a solution because it is focused on doing something “*for*” someone else instead of “*with*” them; he contends that such actions are designed to maintain present hierarchies, “An expression of pity devoid of genuine sympathy, leads to a new form of paternalism” (*Strength to Love* 32). In this, King discusses the issues of philanthropy and financial handouts through entitlement programs.

King also discusses the distribution of wealth and income inequality between the races. He proclaims that too many Americans during his lifetime changed the Declaration of

Independences' pronouncement of equality for all people; he fumes that the word "all" is changed to "some," intentionally relegating entire racial groups to the margins, proclaiming that those people do not deserve the same opportunity and treatment in the workplace (*Strength to Love* 28). Continuing his retort of such ideologies, King argues that narrowing society's focus to advance only one group within America is damaging to the American identity as a whole. He continues with a set of rhetorical questions:

If manufacturers are concerned only in their personal interests, they will pass by on the other side while thousands of working people are stripped of their jobs and left displaced ... and they will judge every move toward a better distribution of wealth and a better life for the working man to be socialistic. If a white man is concerned only about his race, he will casually pass by the Negro who has been robbed of his personhood, stripped of his sense of dignity, and left dying on some wayside road. (*Strength to Love* 28)

King claims that even the hint of asking for better wages creates the brandishing of *Socialist*; and that a worker, especially a poor minority worker, who asks for better wages or working conditions is unappreciative *and* a Socialist.

These corrupt men, King claims, have confused "the internal and the external" and have succumbed to the dangerous temptation that King claims faces all people: allowing "the means by which we live to replace the ends for which we live, the internal to become lost in the external" (*Strength to Love* 68). To edify this notion, King compares these corrupt men to the rich ruler from a parable that Jesus taught; the rich ruler asked Jesus how he might have eternal life, but then failed to follow Jesus' instructions of putting God before money. King parallels modern employers and government policies that create self-deprecating mentalities by not equitably treating men of any race. King calls the rich ruler—and perhaps implies the same of a business owner or politician who allow these practices—an "eternal fool" (*Strength to Love* 71). Just as any who sought to improve subalterns' wages and working conditions were labeled Socialist, any who criticized America's international political policies were labeled Communist.

King proclaims that his opponents would utilize the term Communist towards anyone who disagreed with America's international policies. Too often, opposition is silenced through outlandish fear-instilling falsities, such as labeling someone as a proponent of an anti-democratic oppositional force like Communism. As mentioned in chapter one of the thesis, King's opponents utilized the phrase Communist in an attempt to discredit King's role in the Civil Rights Movement; paradoxically, this gave King a platform to clearly and Biblically refute their claims.

Chapter Ten of *Strength to Love*, titled "How should a Christian view Communism," contends that purporting this false labeling was completed by two groups who shared similarities in comfort, affluence, and privilege: white Christians and politicians. White Christians falsely labeled King as Communist because of his statements condemning their ignoring of the poor, such as, "In spite of the noble affirmations of Christianity, the church has often lagged in its concern for social justice and too often has been content to mouth pious irrelevances and sanctimonious trivialities" (*Strength to Love* 101). King goes further to add specificity to the claim that the religion many Americans proclaim to practice is but a farcical misrepresentation of Jesus' true commands; their religion is focused more on their comfort, perpetuated through politics, than Christ's conviction. He condemns this farce, denouncing, "Colonialism could not have been perpetuated if the Christian Church had really taken a stand against it ... In America slavery could not have existed for almost two hundred and fifty years if the church had not sanctioned it, not could segregation and discrimination exist today if the Christian Church were not a silent and often vocal partner" (*Strength to Love* 101). Through explicit and impassioned criticisms like this, King creates enemies amongst politicians, preachers, and whites.

King's criticisms of America's economic and international policies create the need for silencing, which was attempted through the labeling of Communist. King, however, believes in the Socratic questioning of all aspects of governance, so he examines the idea of Communism against his Christian beliefs:

In the face of the Communist challenge we must examine honestly the weaknesses of traditional capitalism. In all fairness, we must admit that capitalism has often left a gulf between superfluous wealth and abject poverty, has created conditions permitting necessities to be taken from the many to give luxuries to the few, and has encouraged small-hearted men to become cold and conscienceless so that ... they are unmoved by suffering, poverty-stricken humanity. (102)

King's repugnancy with small-hearted men is similar to his condemnations of America's war machines, which he blames for an unwillingness to engage in diplomacy. Dialectics are dulled due to modern technology's weapons. Understanding and diplomacy are unnecessary since American power can use nuclear bombs. Those in power seek to silence King as he upsets the power structure's control over public opinion, especially as King makes statements such as, "War is not the answer. Communism will never be defeated by the use of atomic bombs or nuclear weapons ... We must not call everyone a Communist or an appeaser who recognizes that hate and hysteria are not the final answers to the problems of these turbulent days" (*Strength to Love* 104). According to King, neither Communism nor Socialism are America's most vehement enemies: apathy, avarice, and hate are.

Apathy, avarice, and hate have created a modern democracy in which war hawks deride any questioning, especially if the solution is not employing America's military machine. King sees lunacy in this ideology as he believes that war can no longer provide any "negative good"; because of the "potential destructiveness of modern weapons ... the choice is either nonviolence or nonexistence" (*Strength to Love* 153). King also criticizes liberalism, which he argues "failed to show that reason by itself is little more than an instrument to justify man's defensive ways of

thinking. Reason, devoid of the purifying power of faith, can never free itself from distortions and rationalizations” (*Strength to Love* 148). Liberalism, when not combined with morality, is a useless and flaccid idea.

West, in *Democracy Matters*, also questions this liberalism, which he blames for ignoring evils. Because of this, he contends that both political parties are hypocritical, and he aptly compares American hypocrisy of false labeling and ignoring the poor to Athenian Democracy’s similar practices. Just as the Athenians created their prosperous society on the justification of utilizing slave labor and wage exploitation, modern American conservatism celebrates “justifying an obscene exacerbation of wealth inequality. It is in the face of such egregious misrepresentations of democracy that the example of the original Greek experiment with democracy—especially the witness of Socrates—is so relevant” (*Democracy Matters* 204). Liberalism is equally to blame as it has ignored conditions that have created black rage, allowing politics and power to override justice and equality.

Through comparing King and Malcolm X’s ideologies, West concludes that both political parties are to blame. West, while discussing King’s opinions of black rage, blames liberalism for allowing nihilism to create a “black rage [that] was so destructive and self-destructive that without a broad moral vision and political organization, [this] black rage would wreak havoc on black America” (*Race Matters* 144). In a statement reminiscent of the other three authors, West claims that modern liberalism has become “simplistic—precisely because it focuses *solely* on the economic dimension” (*Race Matters* 4-5). Obama agrees with this statement and discusses this in both of his texts. In *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama contends that political parties must stop demonization. Liberals must acknowledge the morality for which some conservatives advocate. This also includes acknowledging that many subalterns act in immoral ways that are detrimental

toward their own advancement. Conservatives must acknowledge their own harsh misjudgments also (57). Politicians must not ignore morality these issues are not merely external.

Another instiller of nihilism, though, derives from America's immorality abroad. West believes that black rage is a direct result of America's willingness to confront perceived injustice abroad; however, they are unwilling to do the same for disadvantaged communities. American financial, political, and military engagement with Israel—and other foreign countries with which America has vested interests—creates more rage in already nihilistic and downtrodden communities. In both *Race Matters* and *Democracy Matters*, West contends that subalterns within the black community do not agree that certain countries receive aid and intervention while others do not. West states that Israel, for example, is allowed to unquestioningly oppress Palestinians, much the way whites have historically interacted with African Americans. International policies of engagement and meddling with replacing despotic regimes with other, typically similar, democratic or despotic regimes increases subalterns' perception that they are not a true part of the country, and that America continues to have a "weak will to racial justice and an all-inclusive moral vision of freedom and justice for all" (*Race Matters* 111). All of the authors criticize America's weak will to bring justice for all.

The authors, especially Obama and Malcolm X, condemn an arbitrary use of American might to play puppet-master to the world's regimes. Obama's aforementioned experiences in the Philippines evidence his positions well. Malcolm X similarly condemns American foreign interventions with its military:

Why, this man—he can find Eichmann hiding down in Argentina somewhere. Let two or three American soldiers, who are minding somebody else's business way over in South Vietnam, get killed, and he'll send battleships, sticking his nose in their business. He wanted to send troops down to Cuba and make them have what he calls free elections—this old cracker who doesn't have free elections in his own country. (*The Ballot or the Bullet*)

Malcolm X claims that American military might creates subalterns abroad and perpetuates the African American subalterns' belief that they are not a real part of the country. Malcolm X goes a step further than the other authors and states that many of these subalterns wish to separate as they feel being a part of America means being a contributor to imperialism (*The Ballot or the Bullet*). America's willingness to confront perceived evils abroad and ignore those at home perpetuates nihilistic mentalities in African American subalterns.

As discussed in Obama's *Dreams from My Father*, Obama believes that American imperialism has created self-deprecation in African American's identities, which has become "evidence of black pathology" (193). Obama claims that this black pathology was intentionally created by racist systems, which were established following slavery and then revised following the Civil Rights Movement. Obama feels that Chicago is an extreme but apt representation of occurrences throughout America. The negative, nihilistic, and self-deprecating pathologies of African American subalterns are being constantly reinforced by "a bloated bureaucracy and an indifferent state legislature" (*Dreams from My Father* 256). The government is ill-equipped and ill-ready to solve the issues facing African American subalterns, which chapter four will further examine.

Obama's experiences with this bureaucracy are also revealed through his trying to improve living conditions for the Altgeld community. Their apartments and schools are in shambles. Change comes because of unification that pressed political powers. According to Obama, this power has presently and historically been a dominant force in repressing poor African Americans. As Obama reflects upon the nature of power as a youth, he states that political power is currently inextricable from American racism. Obama reveals that nihilistic mentalities in some of his friends are directly caused by environments in which politics

supersede justice. Justice had been denied as costly or unworthy and, therefore, nihilism spreads and subalterns are created:

I had begun to see a new map of the world, one that was frightening in its simplicity, suffocating in its implications. We were always playing on the white man's court ... he had the power and you didn't ... Whatever he decided to do, it was his decision to make, not yours, and because of that fundamental power he held over you, because it preceded and would outlast his individual motives and inclinations, any distinction between good and bad whites held negligible meaning ... Following this maddening logic, the only thing you could choose as your own was withdrawal into a smaller and smaller coil of rage, until being black meant only the knowledge of your own powerlessness, of your own defeat. (*Dreams from My Father* 85)

Obama believes that unrestrained oppressive power creates mental powerlessness and hopelessness: mentalities that predate America's Civil Rights Movement.

The historical frustrations of African Americans with American politics is well evidenced by the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson, and the Constitution. The four authors claim that the founding of America provides a great example of why, historically and presently, African American subalterns feel relegated to the margins and silenced. West states that this is well represented through its paradox, "The fundamental paradox of American democracy in particular is that it gallantly emerged as a fragile democratic experiment over and against an oppressive British empire ... even while harboring its own imperial visions of westward expansion, with more than 20 percent of its population consisting of enslaved Africans" (*Democracy Matters* 42-43). Since America and Britain were both hegemonic oppressive empires run by imperialists, this criticism towards Britain from America is ironic.

The authors all imply that understanding America's paradoxes and ironies are essential to trace its founding to the present. America's founders wish for independence because of British Empire's unchristian and oppressive financial and political practices, which they then exponentially heap onto slaves and Native Americans. Obama captures these contradictions well

in *The Audacity of Hope*, “Self-reliance and independence can transform into selfishness and license, ambition into greed and a frantic desire to succeed at any cost. More than once in our history we’ve seen patriotism slide into jingoism, xenophobia, the stifling of dissent; we’ve seen faith calcify into self-righteousness” (56). Obama and the other authors contend that xenophobia and self-righteousness were and are instrumental in creating African American subalterns. The founders of America had to combat or accept these mentalities as they established the nation.

The Declaration of Independence is promising to the authors though it is another example of paradox: the enslavement of any negates the freedom for all. The authors condemn the hypocrisies, but they also contend that the Declaration of Independence reveals America’s positive possibilities. While it does, as West intimates, still refer to Native Americans as “savages,” the Declaration also implies the personhood and importance of *all* people (*Democracy Matters* 43). West claims that the Declaration itself is ironic as it was written “by the thirty-three-year-old revolutionary Thomas Jefferson—who himself embodies this paradox, being both a courageous freedom fighter against British imperialism and a cowardly aristocratic slaveholder of hundreds of Africans in his beloved Virginia—offers telling testament to this complex and contradictory character of the American democratic experiment” (*Democracy Matters* 43). King discusses this irony also:

Before the pen of Jefferson etched the majestic words of the Declaration of Independence across the pages of history, we were here. For more than two centuries our forebears labored in this country without wages; they made cotton king; they built the homes of their masters while suffering gross injustice and shameful humiliation -and yet out of a bottomless vitality they continued to thrive and develop. If the inexpressible cruelties of slavery could not stop us, the opposition we now face will surely fail. We will win our freedom because the sacred heritage of our nation and the eternal will of God are embodied in our echoing demands. (*Letter from a Birmingham Jail*)

The Declaration of Independence is paradoxical in its demands for equality for all while incepting a carefully-crafted system of repression and oppression for already subjugated slaves.

Paradox is reiterated in America's Constitution. All four authors mention appreciating the idea that the Constitution allows for change and that American politics has positive possibilities for all people; this includes Malcolm X as evidenced by his ideas near the end of his autobiography and the overall goals of *The Ballot or the Bullet*, which is to persuade America to follow the best of its nature. Despite Malcolm X's desiring America's best to override its history, America's hypocrisies are pervasive. Malcolm X does not see their immediate end approaching because, "Uncle Sam's hands are dripping with blood, dripping with the blood of the black man in this country. He's the earth's number-one hypocrite. He has the audacity—yes, he has—imagine him posing as the leader of the free world" (*Ballot or the Bullet*). Like Malcolm X, Obama condemns the historical hypocrisies of America's founders and the supposed enforcers of the founding documents, but Obama maintains hope that positive political change will continue due to the adaptability of the Constitution.

Obama acknowledges the previous injustices and hypocrisies evident in the men who wrote and enforced the Constitution. However, Obama is optimistic that America will follow the Constitution's calls to promote and provide equality. He argues that the Constitution has been manipulated by corruption and racism, but, "despite being marred by the original sin of slavery—has at its very core the idea of equal citizenship under the law ... in the hands of reformers ... these ideals of equality have gradually shaped how we understand ourselves and allowed us to form a multicultural nation the likes of which exists nowhere else on earth" (*The Audacity of Hope* 231-2). The advancement of equality, insofar as politics can, has occurred due to Socratic questioning and the persistence of what King calls, "The tough-minded individual [who] is astute and discerning" (*Strength to Love* 10). The authors believe that Socratic

questioning, especially in politics, comes from tough-mindedness, which includes a willingness to admit wrongdoing and change one's beliefs or practices.

In *Democracy Matters*, West claims that questioning and challenging is essential for progress, "It is when we confront the challenges of our anti-democratic inclinations as a country that our most profound democratic commitments are born, both on the individual and on the societal level" (42). West states that liberals want black people in "our" society "included" and "integrated," while conservatives want them "well behaved" and "worthy of acceptance"; but, "Both fail to see that the presence and predicaments of black people are neither additions to nor defections from American life, but rather *constitutive elements of that life*" (*Race Matters* 6). If American politics follows the courses set by the Declaration of Independence and The Constitution, leaders must courageously utilize Socratic questioning; as King states, "Courage and cowardice are antithetical. Courage is an inner resolution to go forward in spite of obstacles and frightening situations; cowardice is a submissive surrender to circumstance" (*Strength to Love* 119). Because too few politicians have followed this, other alternatives were sought, namely black nationalism.

Black nationalism and Garvey's back-to-Africa-movement both stem from this idea that American society wishes for African Americans to shed their own identity for a majority, or white, identity. Malcolm X is unique to this chapter in that he was a proponent of Marcus Garvey's back-to-Africa movement; however, the selected texts reveal that, following his trip to Mecca, he did wish for American racial wounds to heal if whites and power structures were willing to seek and allow equality. This would require difficult tasks such as an honest admission of wrongdoing and an intentional bringing of voice and mobility to disadvantaged African American communities (*The Ballot or the Bullet*). Contrasting King who sought to ensure people

knew he loved America, Malcolm X encouraged the attention towards a separatist movement. His texts reveal clear changes to his ideologies, which Obama refers to as “religions baggage that Malcolm X seems to have safely abandoned toward the end of his life”; however, Malcolm X does contrast the leaders in his arguing for black separatism while antagonizing America’s nationalist ideologies (*Dreams from My Father* 86). Neither Malcolm X nor the other authors abandon their criticisms of injustice and disparaging American power structures.

This separatism is a dire response to the persistent injustices and the hopelessness they instill. Injustice and hopelessness are precisely why Malcolm X advocates for separation; he sees the situation as politically irreconcilable. Perhaps Malcolm X is trying to bring attention to America’s hypocritical nationalist policies and their national and international creation of subalterns. It is likely that he is literally desiring a separation. Regardless of which is true, this is precisely why the authors do not place all of their hope for change in politics.

Politics are an essential part of change for African American subalterns; but, as Malcolm X states, “I am in agreement one hundred percent with those racists who say that no government laws ever can *force* brotherhood” (*Autobiography*, 376). Laws cannot force brotherhood and they have been slow and frequently inept at providing social justice. While politics are important, the authors all believe that subaltern black youths, families, and communities cannot wait on political assistance because—as evidenced through America’s history and present times—justice for disadvantaged minorities is never politically timely. Progress must not wait or rely on politics. So far the thesis establishes the potential power of religion and politics; the next chapter reveals that the authors argue that citizens must not wait for others to bring change: timely change will most likely begin within communities.

Chapter Four: For the Love of Man

For the boys and girls who grew in spite of these things to
be man and woman, to laugh and dance and sing and
play and drink their wine and religion and success, to
marry their playmates and bear children and then die
of consumption and anemia and lynching;

For my people walking blindly spreading joy, losing time...

For my people blundering and groping and floundering ...
devoured by money-hungry glory-craving leeches,
preyed on by facile force of state and fad and novelty, by
false prophet and holy believer;

For my people standing staring trying to fashion a better way
from confusion, from hypocrisy and misunderstanding,
trying to fashion a world that will hold all the people,
all the faces, all the adams and eves and their countless
generations (Walker, "For My People")

So far, this thesis establishes that the authors desire to bring voice and mobility to subalterns, they are misrepresented by the media, and they have pivotal formative experiences that shape their perspectives toward African American subalterns. The four authors' selected texts contend that Socratic questioning, especially concerning religion and politics, will bring about positive changes for African American subalterns. While leaders should not overlook the errs of media misrepresentation, hypocritical forms Christianity, anaesthetizing Christianity, and political corruption or ignorance, the authors all believe that *timely* change will likely not come from the government.

This chapter reveals that the authors contend determined prophetic leaders must join individuals within these communities. The best method for timely change is subalterns, with the aid of determined grassroots leadership, changing their own external realities and their perspectives of themselves and each other. This chapter will discuss the idea of prophetic proximal advocacy as the best route to timely change for African American subalterns. I discuss

West's idea of prophetic leadership throughout the chapter. Proximal simply means the authors advocate for engaging with communities and not simply for them. This chapter begins as the preceding ones: a brief discussion of how the theoretical ideas apply to and reveal truths from the four authors' texts. Following this, I use the authors' texts to further investigate the notion of prophetic proximal advocacy. I intersperse brief allusions to previously discussed ideas pertaining to religion and politics to advocate for proximal prophetic leadership such as the authors display.

As discussed previously, New Historicism discusses the relationship of postcolonial power structures and the intentionally disadvantaged subalterns. Greenblatt discusses this relationship—congruent with some of Spivak's subaltern contentions—, notably the idea that power structures intentionally relegate minority groups to the fringes of societies. He adds that power structures intentionally allocate tangible resources, infrastructure, and positive images to protect the dominant groups and maintain homeostasis. Access to power-given resources and where a group falls on the society's power hierarchy largely decides their fates; it is “in effect an allocation method—a way of distributing resources to some and denying them to others, critical resources ... that prolong life or, in their absence, extinguish it” (Greenblatt, 51). The withholding of these resources reduces physical quality of life; it also projects false identities onto subalterns, reducing psychological and emotional qualities of life. The authors all contend that this occurs in the African American communities they serve.

The two preceding chapters evince that the authors' selected texts vie for confronting subjugating power structures, namely false religion and self-serving politics; however, this chapter will discuss the author's beliefs that initial and integral changes will likely first occur within disadvantaged communities. While religion and politics should aim improve quality of

life, the authors argue that they have failed and fail to confront the disingenuous allocation of tangible and psychological resources. West summarizes these frustrations well in *Race Matters* as he states, “Like America itself, these communities are in need of cultural revitalization and moral regeneration. There is widespread agreement on this need by all forms of black leadership, but neither black liberals nor the new black conservatives adequately speak to this need” (87). West and the other authors contend that communities must fight the urge to give in to nihilism and self-degradation.

In *Dreams from My Father*, Obama reveals that leaders and community members express “a common weariness, a weariness that was bone-deep. They had lost whatever confidence they might have once had in their ability to reverse the deterioration they saw around them. With that loss of confidence came a loss in the capacity for outrage. The idea of responsibility—their own, that of others—slowly eroded” (230). Leadership, though, must persist and needs other leaders to coalesce. The authors themselves demonstrate the type of grassroots leadership for which they call; they contend that this type of leadership will reinvigorate repressed and oppressed communities. This collaborative advocacy will upset the false version of these communities purported by American culture and media, and, eventually, help subalterns speak and progress. Paradoxically, these communities empowering themselves will engender political change and threaten the stranglehold of postcolonial mentalities, necessitating change from the lagging power structures:

But why, we must ask ourselves, should power record other voices, permit subversive inquiries, register at its very center the transgressions that will ultimately violate it? The answer may be in part that power, even in a colonial situation, is not perfectly monolithic and hence may encounter and record in one of its functions materials that can threaten another of its functions; in part that power thrives on vigilance, and human beings are vigilant if they sense a threat; in part that power defines itself in relation to such threats or simply to that which is not identical with it (Greenblatt, 50).

New Historicism investigates the interaction of culture and power, contending that utilizing the power structures' methods of recording—such as mass media, music, and literature—can disturb marginalization. The authors exemplify this with their books, collaboration with communities, and their clever garnering of media attention for the advancement of African American subalterns.

Spivak's theories from *Can the Subaltern Speak?* contend, like the authors, that collaborative advocacy is effective if it works not just *for* communities but, also, *with* them. Spivak contends that many activists and theorists wish to represent subalterns and believe—consciously or subconsciously—that “the subject is not seen as a representative consciousness (one re-presenting reality adequately)” (*Can the Subaltern Speak?* 70). For true progress, an outside perspective must not simply represent subalterns; representation must occur with and then from subalterns. She later adds that there is a distinct need for intellectuals, such as the four authors, to collaboratively advocate with these communities because subalterns “struggle mute, as opposed to those [outside of disenfranchised communities] who act and speak” (70). The authors, like Spivak, believe that postcolonial power structures have so demoralized and misrepresented marginalized minority communities that they do not even realize they are subaltern, and they do not know how to attain mobility; moreover, if they do realize their predicament, the resources have been removed, and they struggle mute as a result.

Beyond false representation and re-presentation, subalterns can speak given prophetic proximal leadership's advocating for voice and progress. Spivak distinguishes between two types of misrepresentation: representation and re-presentation. Representation refers to a political or subservient power relationship. Re-presentation refers to economic and visual presentation of a subject. In *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Spivak mentions these misrepresentations and the type of

leadership needed to overcome it. Spivak and the authors agree that it is simplistic to believe that beyond power structures' misrepresentations is "where oppressed subjects speak, act, and know for *themselves*"; she adds this "leads to an essentialist, utopian politics" (71). Removal of resources, possibility, and voice have silenced the margins and skewed perspectives; representation and re-presentations have negatively impacted subaltern consciousness. Utopian politics is confronted by bringing the ability for subalterns to eventually self-advocate. Twentieth Century utopian politics has relegated some disadvantaged African Americans to the status of economic and psychological subalterns.

These African American subalterns need prophetic leadership to collaborate with them in their own environments instead of trying to represent them; they need their own identities and modes of economic advancement respected instead of having them falsely re-presented. The authors' texts are congruent with Spivak's contention that, "Full class agency (if there were such a thing) is not an ideological transformation of consciousness on the ground level, a desiring identity of the agents and their interests ... It is a contestatory *replacement* as well as an *appropriation* (a *supplementation*) of something that is 'artificial' to begin with – 'economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life'" (*Can the Subaltern Speak?* 72).

Replacement, appropriation, or supplementation of identity is not what disadvantaged African American communities need. Intellectuals, who are willing to reject the roles of "referee, judge, and universal witness," must combat artificial physical and ideological separation of minorities by Socratically confronting "the persistent constitution of Other as the Self's shadow" (75). This prophetic proximal advocacy is the best option for the marginalized to attain *timely* change.

West explicitly discusses prophetic proximal advocacy, but the other authors, including Spivak, imply the need for such leadership. In *Race Matters*, West provides unifying verbiage for the authors' sentiments:

This new framework should be a *prophetic* one of moral reasoning with its fundamental ideas of a mature black identity, coalition strategy, and black cultural democracy. Instead of cathartic appeals to black authenticity, a prophetic viewpoint bases mature black self-love and self-respect on the moral quality of black responses to undeniable racist degradation in the American past and present. These responses should assume neither a black essence that all black people share nor one black perspective to which all black people should adhere (43)

West provides the phrasing, but all of the authors contend that disadvantaged African American communities need leaders who are willing to form collaborative coalitions that counteract self-degradation; leaders should courageously and creatively confront misrepresentation, disparaging environments, and the removal of life-sustaining resources. This leadership must also respect diversity and morality; leadership that advocates not for ignoring the subjugating role of hypocritical power structures but for helping communities overcome those power structures and forcing the power structures to acknowledge their folly.

In *Dreams from My Father*, Obama includes a powerful story that can be seen as metaphorical for this path to freedom and autonomy. Though discussing colonialism instead of postcolonialism, the idea applies well; he states, “[Kenyans] had learned that an African could work the white man’s machines and had met blacks from America who flew airplanes and performed surgery. When they returned to Kenya, they were eager to share this new knowledge and were no longer satisfied with the white man’s rule. People began to talk about independence” (412). The authors contend that those in disadvantaged African American communities must, as much as possible, empower themselves and each other. With the help of

dedicated leaders, the authors claim that subalterns can resist the pervasive nihilism and degradation applied by the forces of America's power structure.

As discussed in chapters two and three, religion and politics are essential to instituting lasting changes for disadvantaged and silenced communities. Religion is one method for prophetic proximal advocacy. The authors believe that, despite a sometimes-hypocritical history, religion can play a vital role in both empowering leaders and subalterns. Religion is also vital to the removal of the artificial and false representation and re-presentations. Similarly, politics can bring about these changes in voice, identity, and mobility.

While progress can come through politics, that is not the most efficient force for timely change. As mentioned in chapter three, King has some hope in America's political possibilities but condemns any practice of the government that perpetuates injustice for African American subalterns. Throughout *Strength to Love* and *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, he laments and bombasts the slow pace of change that politics and religious institutions bring, adding that political and religious institutions' corruption hinder subalterns' advancement. King claims no matter where he lives, he "would openly advocate disobeying [any] country's antireligious [and disparaging] laws" (*Letter from a Birmingham Jail*). For King and the other authors, prophetic proximal advocacy is paramount. Their love for the disadvantaged supersedes selfish politics. Prophetic proximal advocates should confront any ideology or practice that is incongruent with bringing voice and mobility to the disadvantaged even if that practice is conducted through religious guise.

Since King believes Christianity is a social gospel that teaches peaceful equality for all, he refuses to accept a "negative peace" that comes from selfish subaltern-creating national and international political practices (*Letter from a Birmingham Jail*). Because of this and America's

slow political progression, King believes progression for African American subalterns cannot wait on politics. West also discusses this throughout his two selected texts. In *Race Matters*, West claims that subalterns have justifiably lost hope in American politics:

Instead [of confronting the real issues of maldistribution of wealth and elitist corruption through business and politics], we as a people tolerated levels of suffering and misery among the disadvantaged (especially among poor children of all colors, caught in a vicious natural lottery!), lost faith in our money-driven political system, and lived lives of hedonistic evasion and narcissistic avoidance as the racial divide expanded and the gaps between rich, poor, and working people increased (*Race Matters* 158).

Instead of giving up, due to corrupt politicians perpetuating disparaging gaps, the authors claim that progress must come from leadership working *with* communities. These leaders, especially parents, teachers, and pastors, must help disadvantaged youth by combating the nihilism, narcissism, and hedonism that targets them.

Obama, as a community organizer, sees clearly the negative effects of misrepresentation and resource withholding. These experiences during his years working with communities teach him that progress is possible, “But it is [also] possible for minorities to pull down the shutters psychologically, to protect themselves by assuming the worst” (*Audacity of Hope* 236). Minority youth psychologically surrender due to the rampant problems facing their communities and world, which are largely ignored by the government, and are misrepresented by the media. Obama learns that the answer is not representation or re-presentation, but collaboration. American politics, largely, does not seek collaboration, so the immediate answer must begin elsewhere.

Malcolm X calls the deprecating role of the government in these African American communities a “perfect parasite image,” and he contends, “There ought to be a Pentagon-sized Washington department dealing with every segment of the black man’s problems. Twenty-two million black men! They have given America four hundred years of toil; they have bled and died

in every battle since the Revolution ... and they are still today at the bottom of everything!” (Autobiography 321). Politics has failed America’s most disadvantaged populations.

Consequently, it is reasonable for subalterns, especially subaltern youth, to assume the worst about American politics. Because of this, the authors contend that artificial separation will continue due to political corruption, selfishness, and corporate interests infesting American politics. Change will not begin with politics despite politics being a primary cause of the disparities. The authors are clear: politicians’ both hinder and help communities, but these changes are slow and precarious; timely and lasting changes will begin with leaders taking a collaborative grassroots approach to advocacy, and adults must help youth by counteracting postcolonialism proponents’ claims that subaltern African American youth are worthless and hopeless.

West believes that movements that engage directly with subaltern communities can engender these paradigmatic shifts, especially in community’s youth. He argues that this new framework of engagement should seek to engage, like King and Malcolm X: prophetic engagement that seeks moral reasoning, diverse cultural acceptance, mature and positive identities, and a willingness to use Socratic questioning in all areas of life (*Race Matters* 43). All of the authors’ selected texts, using varying verbiage, discuss this framework of proximal prophetic advocacy: Obama uses his personal experiences to reveal its need, Malcolm X displays this through his changing perspective, King shows the church’s responsibility to engage directly not from afar, and West uses hip-hop as an example for engagement.

Obama is a prime example of this prophetic grassroots advocacy as he spends his post-graduate years working with disadvantaged communities and then has these lessons explicated through his trip to Kenya. Obama learns that lack of prophetic proximal advocacy creates

silence. This silence is best confronted by parents, religious leaders, political organizers, and others willing to work with subaltern communities. They must fight “a breakdown in culture that will not be cured by money alone ... our values and spiritual life matter at least as much as our GDP” (*The Audacity of Hope* 11). Obama contends that legislation without morality and advocacy without direct action leaves subalterns psychologically and spiritually moribund.

This new leadership must confront these evils, and should address not only the material conditions and the psychological mentalities faced by the marginalized, especially teenage male African Americans. In *Dreams from My Father*, he discusses verbally confronting a few boys in a loud car late at night; he is trying to sleep and knows his neighbors have a newborn child. As he reflects on the confrontation, he reveals his newfound fear as he now has something to lose: his voice-bringing advocacy work. He discusses that the boys in the car feel, like he did as a youth, “full of inarticulate resentments and desperate to prove my place in the world” (270). Nihilism, created and perpetuated by politics and then reinforced by media false re-presentations, makes the boys feel these inarticulate resentments. Obama explains that the boys are missing the “social order” that he has found; “not the social order that exists, necessarily, but something more fundamental and more demanding; a sense, further, that one has a stake in this order, a wish that, no matter how fluid this order sometimes appears, it will not drain out of the universe” (270). He states that the boys need opportunity or this teenage angst will grow, deadening their hopes and self-images.

Obama adds context to these lessons during his trip to Kenya. During this trip, Obama visits the gravesite of his father and grandfather where he realizes what held his father back also holds back America’s impoverished youth, “O, Father, I cried. There was no shame in your confusion. Just as there had been no shame in your father’s before you. No shame in the fear, or

in the fear of his father before him. There was only shame in the silence fear had produced ... The silence killed your faith” (429). Colonial and postcolonial societies silence minorities and any who disaffect. The authors contend that strong leadership must, at an intimate level, break this silence. Silence perpetuates hopelessness. Intelligent and devout leadership must confront this silence by ensuring youth have a stake in their social order.

Like Obama, the other authors also collaborate with subaltern communities. As Malcolm X displays the appropriated characteristics of “Detroit Red,” he hustles, robs, uses drugs, and pimps. During this time, Malcolm X lays the foundation for his engagement strategies. He reflects on his time as a criminal with both regret and frustration, and his feelings toward his criminal compatriots long for a different history, “Many times since, I have thought about it, and what it really meant. In one sense, we were huddled in there, bonded together in seeking security and warmth and comfort from each other, and we didn’t know it. All of us—who might have probed space, or cured cancer, or built industries—were, instead, black victims of the white man’s American social system” (Autobiography 93). Malcolm X fights this appropriation of false identity through prophetic proximal advocacy through his work with the Nation of Islam and following his split with the group. Malcolm X’s speeches discussed in his Autobiography display his passion and love while engaging with African American subalterns.

He regrets his previous actions as they harmed fellow subalterns, but explains that he had “been looking at the exploitation that for the first time I really saw and understood. Now I watched brothers entwining themselves in the economic clutches of the white man who went home every night with another bad of the money drained out of the ghetto” (Autobiography 197). Following this revelation, Malcolm X spends the rest of his life rectifying his mistakes by collaborating with disenfranchised communities. Malcolm X repeatedly contends, “For the

freedom of my 22 million black brothers and sisters here in America, I do believe that I have fought the best that I knew how, and the best that I could, with the shortcomings that I have had. I know that my shortcomings have been many” (Autobiography 387). Passionate, humble, and hands-on leadership must confront injustices to aid the physical and psychological misdeeds perpetuated by America’s social systems. Like Malcolm X, King utilizes religion to work directly with subaltern communities.

King mainly blames Christians and the American Christian church for their ignoring the plight of African American subalterns. He states that many call his prophetic proximal advocacies “extreme,” “unwise,” and “untimely”; however, he contends that they must engage in “direct action” or “repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people” (*Letter from a Birmingham Jail*). Silence reigns and is a subjugating force in disadvantaged communities; like Spivak and the other authors, King believes silence becomes voice by prophetic advocating with these communities.

King contends that prophetic proximal advocacy occurs when men are toughminded and tenderhearted. Silence comes from an unwillingness to confront injustice. King calls this being softminded, and he argues that, “Softmindedness is one of the basic causes of race prejudice” (*Strength to Love* 12). However, King claims toughmindedness unaccompanied by tenderheartedness detaches one from reality and creates what Spivak calls “utopian politics” (*Can the Subaltern Speak?* 71). King claims that leaders working with these communities must have or develop these ideologies and perspectives because, “Toughmindedness without tenderheartedness is cold and detached, leaving one’s life in a perpetual winter devoid of the warmth of spring and the gentle heat of summer” (*Strength to Love* 13). King desires for others

to utilize these traits within their advocacy and action campaigns; additionally, his actions depict the combination of toughminded and tenderhearted leadership.

King had little fear of repercussions and was willing to sacrifice his image, comfort, and his life for the cause of bringing voice and mobility to African American subalterns. His many incarcerations and unwarranted beatings, and, eventually, his assassination evidence this well. While physically, spiritually, and mentally placing himself in the foray, King, like the other authors, attempts to garner additional support. As aforementioned, the media is one powerful tool the authors used against American postcolonialism. King uses the media to garner additional attention during his direct action campaigns:

We had no alternative except to prepare for direct action, whereby we would present our very bodies as a means of laying our case before the conscience of the local and the national community. Mindful of the difficulties involved, we decided to undertake a process of self purification. We began a series of workshops on nonviolence, and we repeatedly asked ourselves: "Are you able to accept blows without retaliating?" "Are you able to endure the ordeal of jail?" (*Letter from a Birmingham Jail*)

King's selected texts show numerous collaborative actions that prove he sought to engage with communities, not simply for them. The Montgomery bus protests King discusses in *Strength to Love* are another impactful event displaying his willingness to sacrifice for, work with, and garner attention for subaltern communities.

Like King, West utilizes prophetic proximal leadership in attempts to bring voice and mobility to African American subalterns. West believes, as do the other authors, that prophetic leadership must come from the best efforts of the most capable advocates. These leaders must primarily focus on improving the subalterns' identity construction, environments, and possibilities. In *Race Matters*, he contends "If the elimination of black poverty is a necessary condition of substantive black progress, then the affirmation of black humanity, especially among black people themselves, is a sufficient condition of such programs ... The quest for

black identity involves self-respect and self-regard, realms inseparable from, yet not identical to, political power and economic status” (97). According to West, hip-hop is a tool that leaders can and should use to bring voice and mobility to African American subalterns. As self-proclaimed “bluesman,” West has recorded his own rap album and maintains relationships with some hip-hop artists who he feels are benefiting communities (*Democracy Matters*).

Hip-hop, West contends, is a viable option for aiding disadvantaged communities. Market appropriation pigeonholes this art form as an avenue for financial gain, but it can bring psychological advancement that counteracts nihilism. In fact, hip-hop has minimally generated money for disadvantaged communities; West claims that media and entertainment companies usurp this art form in order to profit from communities’ detriments, effectively funneling money and talent from communities while encouraging the creation of hip-hop that promotes violence and self-degradation (*Democracy Matters* 181). Contrastingly, leaders should “encourage prophetic voices in hip-hop—voices that challenge youth to be self-critical rather than self-indulgent, Socratic rather than hedonistic” (*Democracy Matters* 184). West’s recording and encouraging the recording of prophetic hip-hop voices is one way in which prophetic proximal advocacy can occur.

Unfortunately, according to West, too few prophetic leaders are willing to associate their image with an art form that has been corrupted by a racist entertainment system. Moreover, a clear stigma follows West because of his hip-hop experiment, especially from Lawrence Summers and other Harvard administration officials who do not understand the need and purposes of such advocacy. Misunderstanding hip-hop, according to West, perpetuates unheard voices and further silences subaltern communities. He adds, “What a horrible irony it is that this poetry and critique could be co-opted by the consumer preferences of suburban white youths—

white youths who long for rebellious energy and exotic amusement in their own hollow bourgeois world” (*Democracy Matters* 183). This “unprecedented cultural breakthrough created by talented poor black youths in the hoods of the empire’s chocolate cities” has now become mere spectacle and a misrepresentation of the disadvantaged in these communities (*Democracy Matters* 179). Though West is the only author to specifically contend that hip-hop is voice-bringing and an effective method of advocacy, all of the authors advocate for various methods of prophetic proximal advocacy.

While the authors have different tools and strategies, all proclaim the need for prophetic leadership to create collaborative coalitions that develop positive identities by countering misrepresentations. This leadership—by countering misrepresentations and creating accurate representations and re-presentations—also garners media attention and, eventually, brings voice and mobility to these communities.

Conclusion

I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Counciler or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice ... who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a "more convenient season." Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection. (*Letter from a Birmingham Jail*)

West, Obama, Malcolm X, and King all attempt to bring voice and mobility to African American subalterns. The authors' selected texts are very different, as are the authors themselves, but they share similarities also. Despite their differences and the precariousness of progress, the authors believe similar means can accomplish an essential unifying goal: utilize, and help other leaders and minorities utilize, the power of religion and the influence of politics to bring voice and mobility to African American subalterns. Subalterns can eventually utilize these power structures if prophetic leaders are willing to collaborate with and not simply for them, synergistically confronting disparities by utilizing the tools of media, politics, and organized religion. The authors all imply that there are two different courses of action: macro and micro prophetic leadership, both of which must work with *and* for subaltern communities.

When advocacy is proximal and prophetic, such as King's direct action campaigns and West's engagements with communities surrounding his university campuses, prophetic leaders will bring timely changes for subalterns within disadvantaged communities. When performed nationally and internationally, such as Obama's political actions or Malcolm X's newfound perspective following international trips, prophetic leaders can help avoid the perpetuation of American postcolonial oppression at home and abroad. By addressing both areas, future

generations can avoid the disenfranchisement that impoverished minorities have experienced throughout American history. All four men believe leaders must be willing to sacrifice for progress. They must also help subalterns speak for themselves. This prophetic proximal leadership brings timely change while political and religious power structures slowly begin to fulfill their intended purposes.

As with other instances of change-over-time investigated in the thesis, Malcolm X's autobiography is microcosmic and provides an adequate comparison. Malcolm X's blind rage changes to voice-bringing directed rage, which depicts his broadened scope that is engendered by the bringing of voice and mobility; these changes provide an example of the theories discussed by Spivak and the authors.

This does not mean that the authors' ideologies and goals are all synonymous; they are quite different and much previous research establishes their contrasts. Future research should continue to investigate their congruence, especially as America enters into a post-Obama era. Scholarship shift its focus to investigate ways prophetic leadership can coalesce. Socratic questioning proves the need for finding common ground, which prophetic leaders attain by working with diverse leadership and populations. This is accomplished not by sacrificing ends or means, but acknowledging that whoever is not against subalterns' progress and voice is for it.

The Socratic questioning the authors direct toward postcolonial repression of African American subalterns predates and continues after their texts. There are three areas of future scholarship that could expand upon the scope of this thesis. Investigating previous civil rights dialectics that pertain to African American subalterns could evince other foil couples such as WEB Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. Analyzing the postcolonial treatment of the female minority subject could utilize the same authors and add others, revealing improvements or

stagnation in the representation and re-presentations of the female subject. Lastly, evaluating both widely disseminated male dialectics for their presentation of the female's consciousness and the inclusion of the female voice itself would benefit postcolonial America's changing gender dynamics.

Future scholarship should compare these 20th Century authors to their predecessors and successors, especially those who media skews as being antagonists. WEB Du Bois and Booker T. Washington provide an apt addition to the comparisons discussed throughout the thesis. The authors vary greatly, criticize each other, and are disparagingly displayed by media; however, they have areas of congruence. The dialectics of the authors is simply a continuation of such historical dialectics preceding the authors' mildly-progressed times. Du Bois and Washington are two other authors who contrast greatly; but, like the authors, they ultimately desire the same end: improvement for African American subalterns. Of course, downplaying the differences in Du Bois and Washington's ideologies and actions is illogical—as it would be illogical and misrepresentative when comparing the other four authors—, but it is not the goal of this study to proclaim people do not differ. This idea of foil authors and whether hegemony desires their presentation as antagonists could expand to include the female voice. Are there antagonists or foils of Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, Zora Neale Hurston, Angela Davis, Shirley Chisholm, and bell hooks? This thesis reveals common ground while investigating the role of foils in their respective time periods. Due to time and space, I could not expand this thesis' scope to encompass more diverse authors and give them the respectful and thoughtful analysis they deserve. Future studies should investigate the roles of diverse foils or antagonists and hegemonies' presentation of these authors. It is the goal of American postcolonial power structures to silence opposition; by creating division, prophetic opposition is weakened. By

seeking to find congruence between mis-presented authors and figures, scholars can begin to expand perceptions of ability and voice.

It is apparent that all of the authors, including Du Bois and Washington, share common goals and desire Socratic questioning to bring about progress for African American subalterns. All six authors imply that perceptions of external realities are improved by changing internal realities of hopelessness. Changing internal realities occurs when prophetic proximal leadership, especially though not solely through religion, collaborates with communities and challenges any disparaging power structure. Polarization is increased by merely investigating contrasts. Future scholarship should focus on these six authors, investigating the dialectics of Du Bois and Washington; this will depict changes throughout the 20th Century. This research will likely indicate media misrepresentation; it will also reveal convergence in goals and some means as it investigates the changes and improvements over time between Du Bois and Washington, Malcolm X and King, and Obama and West.

Future research should also seek to uncover essential gender differences between the time periods. Investigating the authors' treatment of female subjects is pertinent as this is a major point of difference between the foils from the 1960s and the latter 1900 foils; it is also a pressing issue affecting America in many ways. However, I believe this scholarship will present a more accurate depiction if it utilizes New Historicism as the men are inextricably connected to their time periods: their presentation of the female subject will likely share similarities with the dominating group's image projection. Just as the authors discuss the evils of segregation impacting people of all races, sexism impacts both genders. Understanding their historical and social contexts reveals their limitations. Researchers should not view authors as seeking the same goal as antagonists, scholarship should view them as foils. Seeking coalescence between foils—

even while examining how they differ to other time periods—increases Socratic questioning, reduces polarization, and could reduce disparity.

Men benefit greatly from postcolonialism. Readers can see a distinct difference between the authors' ideologies of women when comparing the 1960s selected texts to those of the later 1900s. Obama and West respect and revere women, and they do not intentionally misrepresent or misre-present their consciousness. In *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama explicitly praises Michelle Obama, proclaiming that she is equal to him, and is, in many ways, superior. Throughout both *Race Matters* and *Democracy Matters*, West criticizes current and previous American leaders, including Malcolm X and King, for their ignoring women's issues. This contrasts to King who largely ignores women in *Strength to Love* and *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, and, especially Malcolm X, who explicitly claims men are superior in his autobiography. This research, of course, should not seek to justify Malcolm X's sexism or King's willingness to ignore pressing female issues, but it will better indicate why they view their external realities in such a way. New Historicism will specifically aid this goal.

These changes between the foil civil rights couples of the 1960s and latter 1900s may not evince gender egalitarianism, but they do intimate a positive shift in perspective. The same can be said of the dynamic between African Americans and American power structures. The relationship is improving, but equality is certainly not present, especially for those trapped in cyclical forms of repression, oppression, self-deprecation, and nihilism. Therefore, one last area of scholarship related to this thesis should investigate this changing relationship and how it has impacted the representation and re-presentation of women, and the inclusion of female voices.

Using the lens of New Historicism and Spivak's theories from *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, future research should investigate both the changing nature of male minorities' voices toward

females, and the inclusion of female minorities' voices in widely disseminated dialectics.

According to Spivak, "The postcolonial intellectuals learn that their privilege is their loss. In this they are a paradigm of the intellectuals ... If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (82-3). For the men studied in this thesis, their *privilege* is their loss, as mine likely is also. The authors all believe that postcolonial power structures, especially media and politics, misrepresent and silence minorities' voices. Women's voices have been similarly misrepresented and silenced. Achievements remain male-dominated in the realms of wealth, politics, academia, religion, and business. According to Spivak, these persist in postcolonial societies unless intelligent leadership collaborates with subalterns to help these groups speak for themselves.

Females are clearly not allowed to speak for themselves in any of the selected texts. While Obama and West explicitly condemn sexism and praise numerous women for their accomplishments, they are still speaking *for* the female subject. More explicitly, through King's disinterest in the female subject and Malcolm X's appropriation of consciousness to the female subject, readers see Spivak's idea reiterated as she claims, "When we come to the concomitant question of the consciousness of the subaltern, the notion of what the work *cannot* say becomes important" (82). The men cannot address and aptly appropriate consciousness, nor can they adequately speak for females. If African American subaltern's voices have been silenced and misrepresented, the female voice is even more in danger of remaining silenced, misrepresented, and misre-presented. As Spivak later contends, "Can the subaltern speak? What must the elite do to watch out for the continuing construction of the subaltern? The question of 'woman' seems most problematic in this context. Clearly, if you are poor, black, and female you get it in three ways" (90). The sole focus on male authors in this study provides further evidence that female

voices have likely been repressed. Consequently, future studies should investigate these four authors and how their texts reveal “sexuated difference where social discourses are intertwined with psychic images of the self” (Fotaki 1271). These areas of future scholarship intimate the authors’ possible shortcomings, which New Historicism indicates is connected to their environments.

All three areas of future study need New Historicism’s lens. The reason for this is that authors interact with varying environments. For instance, though the four selected authors for this thesis eventually advocate for the same end—voice and mobility for the most disadvantaged and repressed—their experiences and environments indicate their varied tones, perspectives, and means. As aforementioned in the thesis, Malcolm X provides an excellent microcosm for analyzing this idea of external reality impacting internal reality, and the reverse. Much criticism of Malcolm X comes from his earlier claims about white devils, and the need for separation due to irreconcilable differences. These evince a clear short-sightedness that he appears to counter post-Mecca. West and Spivak’s analyses and evaluations of subaltern communities perhaps explains this change in perspective.

Prior to his first conversion experience, Malcolm X feels as if he has neither voice nor possibility for advancement. Postcolonial America creates such debasement in his mindset that nihilism is natural and advancement is alien. Because of this, self-deprecation and short-sightedness is Malcolm X’s external *and* internal realities. Malcolm X is approached by the prophetic proximal advocacy of Elijah Muhammad. While misinformed and shortsighted himself, Elijah does collaborate *with* Malcolm X, instilling in him a sense of self-worth through morality and meaningful work. Temporarily exiting America’s repressive environment allows Malcolm X to more accurately view his external reality and understand his internal reality.

It is important to note that Elijah Muhammad is simply one step toward mobility for Malcolm X. After his visit to Mecca, Malcolm X realizes that American society perverts subalterns' ability to represent themselves and progress; however, he also realizes it thwarts whites from positively approaching race relations and equality. He begins to realize that, "The society has produced and nourishes a psychology which brings out the lowest, most base part of human beings" (Autobiography 378). Malcolm X still contends that black nationalism is a potential option due to the pervasiveness of the perversity, but he no longer believes whites are *inherently* evil. In the same way, the female voice speaking for itself will intimate that they are not inferior or incapable.

The female attainment of full class agency, or equitable agency, could follow Malcolm X's trajectory. The authors may play an initial voice-bringing role. Just as Malcolm X attains newfound influence because of the Nation of Islam, females can begin to attain a voice by utilizing male voices, eventually breaching patriarchy. This voice can improve over time. Malcolm X has a voice; but, because of better informed and less oppressed international prophetic leadership willing to collaborate with Malcolm X, he attains a more accurate perspective of his external realities and how those impact his internal realities.

Elijah Muhammad's example is a poignant one, comparative to the authors' treatments of the female subjects. While Elijah Muhammad does misrepresent history—perhaps due to ignorance, desires for personal gain, or perhaps desires for improving subaltern communities—he also creates a collaborative coalition that brings voice and mobility to African American subalterns. Without Elijah Muhammad's shortsighted and skewed perspective, the world would never have known Malcolm X. Without Malcolm X and King's failure to accurately focus on women, West and Obama would not learn from their example. Without Obama, America would,

perhaps, never have the next minority president. Perhaps minority women in America will speak as they are truly able due to Obama and West's advocating for gender equality. Progress begets progress, but only if determined, passionate, and intelligent leadership engages in proximal prophetic advocacy.

The authors have provided an example of prophetic proximal leadership despite their shortcomings, which have been a primary focus for many: Obama does not confront racism explicitly enough, Malcolm X does not sufficiently seek to heal the divide he creates, King does not adequately condemn hatred and white evils, and West creates division and criticizes African American leaders too frequently. While the authors would all argue criticism and questioning of the powerful and influential is essential, their areas of congruence are oft overlooked.

Influential figures are typically seen as being before-their-time by power structures and are acknowledged post-mortem. King is honored by a federal holiday celebrating his sacrifices; it is insignificant whether this act reeks of political positioning or genuinely honors King. The presentation of King matters; unfortunately, many falsely re-present King's legacy and quotes. Similarly, modern Americans misre-present Malcolm X as a member of the Nation of Islam who is unjustifiably angry. The mere mention of Malcolm X's name causes whites to become uncomfortable due to this misrepresentation. The incongruence between Malcolm X and King's ideologies and actions encourage the unfortunate stance many middle class whites seem to have: ignore any claims the authors made about themselves and rely upon power structures to inform opinions.

This appropriation of truth and identity are perplexing and damage democratic energies. Malcolm X and King could likely have taken the Civil Rights Movement farther faster if hegemonic power structures had not created false representation and re-presentation. Similarly,

any congruence between modern politicians and African American prophetic voices are overwhelmed or muted by media's desire for attention-grabbing headlines. Obama and West are in a slightly different position than Malcolm X and King, in part because they are interacting with different time periods and neither experienced life as a subaltern.

Obama and West are also interacting with seemingly stagnant or even regressive policies regarding disadvantaged minorities. Minorities disproportionately experience poorer health outcomes, wage gaps. The income gap between the 90th and 10th percentiles also disproportionately affects minorities (Kurtzleben). The income gap is especially pertinent when combined with Obama's discussions in chapter three that whites' net financial worth is significantly higher than non-whites. Obama faced staunch opposition from a polarized Congress. Because of this, some of his policies were not implemented and others were shells of his original plans. Because of this, West vehemently criticizes Obama's lack of foresight for subaltern and disadvantaged African American communities, international engagement policies, and appointment of elected officials, calling Obama a "Republican, a Rockefeller Republican in blackface" (Tavis Smiley 34:40). However, New Historicism reveals that Obama interacts with systems he did not create; also, he engages with politicians and media pundits who immediately discredit him because of his last name and his skin tone: aforementioned misrepresentations that he practices Islam and follows racial extremism evince this well.

Is Obama a Republican in blackface? Did Obama fail the purposes which he so passionately proclaims in *Dreams from My Father* and *The Audacity of Hope*? Is West attempting to garner media attention? Is West disgruntled that he was not invited to certain ceremonies or awarded a position? It is certainly true that Obama did not accomplish all he wished to: the overall wage gap actually increased, North Korea expanded their nuclear

capabilities, the United States bombed more countries than prior to Obama's administration, some disparities actually increased for minorities, and twenty million more people were displaced as refugees than when Obama took office (Kurtzleben).

Despite the policy failures and the very real and poignant sufferings experienced at home and abroad, many of Obama's policies succeeded. America has sought to implement a more just healthcare system for over a century; Obama succeeded. America desired Iran to not amass nuclear weapons; Obama diplomatically resolved that issue. America started two wars, which many international leaders denounced; Obama ended them. America was experiencing a drastic recession and 7.8% unemployment rates; Obama fixed this and reduced the rate to 4.7%. American gender wage gaps are less disparaging, nuclear stockpiles have dropped, America's carbon footprint diminished, refugees legally entering has increased though the number of illegal immigrants has decreased, inhuman torture and torture centers like Guantanamo Bay have been stopped or are in the process of being stopped, and the United States has embassies in both China and Cuba. The real question that Americans must ask is what could Barack Obama have accomplished with less polemic opposition?

Obama's presidency proves a claim made by all four selected authors: political progress that brings change for individuals is slow, precarious, and sometimes temporary. It is because of this that Obama, after eight years as the President of the United States, still believes in prophetic proximal advocacy. He states in his Farewell Address, "[Chicago] is where I learned that change only happens when ordinary people get involved, and they get engaged, and they come together to demand it ... It is the beating heart of our American idea, our bold experiment in self-government" (3:50). Throughout this speech he references the ideas of unity, equality, and

synergy. He contends that diplomacy, health insurance, and economic prosperity solidify his legacy as president.

Obama as a politician, especially one who must work with the oppositional party, had to compromise. West, Malcolm X, and King's advocacies did not require compromise as they were not politicians; however, Obama's position necessitated compromise. These compromises included policies that would reduce disparities for all of America's disadvantaged. Though he does not primarily focus on race as some like West seem to desire, he sufficiently addresses the issue in the Farewell Address:

For white Americans, [working together] means acknowledging that the effects of slavery and Jim Crow didn't simply vanish in the 60s. That when minority groups voice discontent, they are not just engaging in reverse racism, or practicing political correctness. When they wage peaceful protests, they're not demanding special treatment, but the equal treatment our founding fathers promised" (21:00).

Because of Obama accomplishing many of his goals, to the best of his ability in the given oppositional forces and unfortunate circumstances, I agree with Dr. Michael Eric Dyson who states that Obama is much like Jackie Robinson; he is a forerunner who "was the best ... suited to exist under the conditions that white folks would impose upon him. So I'm not suggesting that Mr. Obama is not a brilliant man. ... I love him. ... I love how he looks at black folks. I love how he looks at white folks. But at the end of the day, he's Jackie Robinson. I'm waiting for Willie Mays to come behind him" (1:40). I say this not as a testament to Obama's failures, but to the legacy of his success despite a Congress controlled by opposition that Obama impressively aligned many times.

Barack Obama is no Republican, especially by today's standards; however, political progress is slow and precarious. As stated throughout chapter four, timely change is only brought through prophetic proximal advocacy. Obama successfully thwarted racist hegemony and

postcolonial mindsets from the highest position attainable in American democracy; he surely did not accomplish all he wished, and he failed in some areas.

Obama's presidency did seek to bridge the gap and provide voice to the voiceless. West's passion is appropriate but his frustrations are misplaced. Obama creating the longest sustained period of job and economic growth has helped all Americans; Obama ending questionable international conflicts has reduced national and international collateral damage; Obama using diplomacy instead of military might directly correlates to West's wishes discussed in *Democracy Matters*. Obama attempted to reduce national and international subalterns through his presidential actions and policies. Because of this, Obama receives varying criticism. Unlike West, some of Obama's vehement critics condemn the president for releasing prisoners, removing business profiteering from the prison industrial complex, criticizing the lack of background checks for the purchase of guns, and ending wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. These presidential actions and the others previously mentioned undoubtedly prove that Obama still seeks to provide voice and mobility to the world's most disadvantaged.

There are disadvantaged groups throughout the world. Throughout their texts all four authors contend that America has created disparities and has a responsibility to fix them, especially since America is prosperous. America will remain prosperous despite disparaging practices. America's subalterns are psychologically degraded, which relegates them to the fringes; however, when compared to those of the developing world, the American disadvantaged have a much higher quality of life. Obama sought to reduce disparity whenever he saw it. For Obama, providing healthcare, removing the possibility of death in an unjust war, and improving the economy directly aids America's minorities as well as some who have been negatively affected by American imperialism.

New Historicism aids my evaluating Obama's policies and critics. Because of this perspective, I believe without doubt that West appropriately places his passion toward equality; however, his attempts to garner media attention for the issue or his pettiness emphasized by him using "the language of a jilted lover" could be damaging for the Democratic Party and may have hurt Bernie Sanders' attempts at office (Miller). New Historicism reveals that none, including the authors, have a *pure* perspective and that our external and internal realities tarnish or enhance our perspective. However, by looking at Obama's texts and the occurrences during his presidency that Obama could control, Obama follows his desires to bring voice and mobility to national and international repressed, suppressed, and disenfranchised.

Moreover, New Historicism aids this thesis' investigation of how African American subalterns have been repressed and silenced due to misrepresentation by media and the removal of resources. New Historicism explains that these men are interplaying with a system they neither create nor select. The authors can never have a pure perspective toward equality as they have never experienced this; conversely, whites during the two time periods will have a skewed perspective of racial equality, whether they desire equality or disparity.

New Historicism explains that minority groups are able to utilize the dominating society's tools, which the four authors advocate for and practice; the utilization of politics, religious structures, media outlets are particularly important to the authors and for future investigations of disadvantaged groups or communities. Because of the utilization of these powerful tools and the accompanying voice they release, readers can see distinct chronological changes for African American subalterns. America's postcolonial perspectives have changed and are changing. The selected texts microcosmically represent these changes.

Finally, Spivak's theories in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* provides a perspective of cyclical poverty and nihilism indicative of other subjugates' experiences in postcolonial societies. As impoverished national and international subalterns struggle mute, intelligent leadership must advocate; the authors add example and rhetoric to Spivak's claims. It is because of Spivak's theories that I make my final reflections upon the authors' texts in the closing paragraph.

American society must decide if subaltern African Americans, who are trapped in cyclical nihilism and poverty, are inherently evil and lazy; or, they must decide that circumstantial and environmental factors necessitate a survivalist mentality and perpetuate a nihilistic point of view, accompanied by immorality and shortsightedness. Either minority subalterns are lazy, or they are without hope. Either they are they are incapable brutes, or they are subjugated and repressed. Either they have no worthwhile contribution to make, or they have been bombarded with deprecating messages that advocate temporary pleasures due to one's valueless state. There is no middle ground. If politicians believe the former statements from the preceding sentences, they should stop placating and, in the words of Malcolm X and West, call a spade a spade. If they believe the latter statements from the preceding sentences, they must act and vote upon these convictions. Perhaps it is time for unification and for average citizens to call a spade a spade. Either those in power are racist, willfully ignorant, evil, or corrupt. There is no middle ground. Americans should address this issue, or accept their role as supremacists and colonialists in the 21st Century. As West claims in *Race Matters*, "Only if we are as willing to as Malcolm X to grow and confront the new challenges posed by the black rage of our day will we take the black[, gender, and sexual orientation] struggle to a new and higher level. The future of this country may well depend on it" (151).

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