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Theorizing Black Community

Richard A. Jones
University of Colorado at Boulder

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Since the passage of the Civil Rights Act (1965) black leaders (public intellectuals and philosophers) have proposed a wide array of models for the African American community. This paper examines the possibilities for theorizing legitimate, non (so-called) "pathological" African American communities. Martin Luther King laid the groundwork for the discussion with the concept of "Beloved Community" in "Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?" The paper traces the evolution of visions of "community" from the end of the second reconstruction to present speculations.

Following King's argument, I contrast Cornel West's vision for community in "Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity." Whereas King believed "integration" through jurisprudence was sufficient to bring about a Christian community of "caritas" (other directed love), West argues that King's tacit endorsement of liberalism sabotages the possibility for "Beloved Community" for African Americans. On West's view, Radical Christianity and Marxism (or at least socialism) should motivate black community formation from the Marx terms "the Kingdom of Necessity" to "the Kingdom of Freedom." Given the continued crises surrounding unemployment, crime and welfare, integrationism and assimilationism are adjudged failed strategies for building the black community. Despite West's cogent plea for Blacks to embrace socialism, most African Americans continue to struggle beneath the false consciousness of liberalism's hegemonic promises for success. Finally, this paper examines Lucius Outlaw's "On Race and Philosophy" as a possible third moment between the King-West opposition. Outlaw, familiar with the distortions and dislocations postmodernity visits on the black community, argues for theorizing transformative social praxis on the successes (however limited) of Marxism and liberalism. The "secular religion" ("Beloved Community") King envisioned, and West modifies by socialist critique, is rejoined on the terrain of higher level harmonization of the disparate poles of King and West's conception of "community."

Finally, the paper explores the possibilities for the fine-grained, philosophically nuanced "critical social theory" outlined by Outlaw given the influences of postmodernity, feminist socialism and identity formation on African American lived-realities. Some of the questions this paper examines follow. If neither "utopian" nor practical visions for the black "community" can be situated on any extant socio-political terrain during late post-industrial capitalism, what are the possibilities for any transformative political praxis? Within the fragmentation of majoritarian white community formation processes, how might blacks pursue legitimate community? Are black community formation processes,

and the theories that make these formation processes possible, the transformative strategy behind cultural and/ or political nationalism? What would a black community without the distortions of racism, sexism and class exploitation, be theorized to be? And finally, if King and West's formulations for "community" are flawed, and Outlaw's synthesis of Liberalism and Marxism fail to be realized in "community," *what* theoretical moves remain?

PRESENTER

Richard A. Jones, a doctoral student in the Philosophy Department at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Having taught middle-school, high school and university mathematics and computer science for much of his teaching career, Jones began formal training in academic philosophy at the University of Denver at the age of forty-seven. He holds five earned university degrees, including an M.A. in Philosophy from the University of Denver. Jones is a member of the RPA (Radical Philosophy Association.) His philosophical interests include, the philosophy of science, sociopolitical philosophy and moral philosophy. Currently, he is working with Alison Jaggar on a prospectus for the dissertation, from which portions of this paper were derived.