

Coping with and Hoping Through Faith Despite Economic Circumstances

I am determined to get you rich! Turn to 2 Corinthians 8:9. What does rich mean [according to the scripture]? ...it means abundantly supplied. Now go to Isaiah 1:19 [reading from the Living Bible Translation] the word 'abound' here means extremely rich. God is making you extremely rich so you can make others extremely rich.

As I sit in the sanctuary of Faith Power Ministries, a storefront non-denominational church in a refurbished shopping mall in Tuskegee, the county seat of Macon County, Alabama, I look around at others there and reflect that I could have stayed at home and watched this sermon on my computer. It was my first visit; I had not known that this church plant of a Midwestern megachurch streams in sermons live via the Internet from their parent church every Sunday morning during worship service. The confident, passionate senior pastor that I am watching on a large screen in the front of this local congregation here in Tuskegee goes on to explain wealth, both inside and outside of the “Kingdom.” “In the Kingdom [of God],” he explains, “everybody is rich. Outside the Kingdom, in the ‘world’ a few are rich, and some are starving and lots are just making it from day to day.” The sanctuary of this church plant is reminiscent of various megachurches that I’ve either attended or seen on television—it is stripped down, has no signs of specific religious or denominational symbolism, no large pulpit or choir loft, no cross, no stained glass, no communion table or communion elements, just a single

glass podium and an emphasis on the global nature of their ministry—flags from various countries lined the walls of the sanctuary.

The senior pastor uses an accessible example of how wealth works in the Kingdom of God: “If you’re falling short on money to buy those Christmas gifts, then what do you need to do?” he asked. The people in the congregation responded in unison, “Sow,” and he confirms that is correct because, “it’s impossible for you to sow seed and not get a harvest.” Central to his conception of wealth is the principle of sowing (seed—usually in the form of money given to the pastor or church) and reaping (harvest—usually financial).

The next Sunday, I attend Redeemer’s Christian Church, a much smaller and relatively new non-denominational church outside of the small town of Tuskegee, in rural Macon County. I had trouble finding the building where mainly working-class and working poor individuals worship because I mistook it for someone’s home. Had it not been for the small, three-by-three-foot banners over the windows with Christian symbols and the church’s name, I would not have known that it was a church. Although it looked like a modest home on the outside, once inside, there were pews, a small humble wooden podium that served as a pulpit and meager space for a choir. You could tell that this was an approximately 1000 square foot single family home that had been gutted and converted into a sanctuary that welcomed, on average, seven to twelve worshippers each Sunday. The sermon was the highlight of the worship experience; there is no choir, not a lot of singing, not much formality to the order of worship. A charismatic female pastor in her late thirties is admonishing her congregation to live holy, sacrificial lives, and to be on guard against falling prey to the prevailing values of individualism, materialism, and consumerism that mark American culture.

The status quo is not good enough for God. Jesus did not conform to the status quo. Everybody wants the American Dream and this has caused the Body of Christ to be lulled into a drunken stupor...pastors and prophets will begin to preach the American Dream and Christians will become a people searching for things and not talking about holiness. As Christians, we have to be different to make a difference in this world. When you conform to the world, you lose power... As Christians, we wrestle with identity, wanting to fit into American culture. America is a capitalistic society; only the strong survive, however, God does not say this. Because we’re in a capitalistic society we believe we have to possess certain things to show

that we have ‘arrived’. Stop conforming to the standards the “world” has set; what’s important is where your heart is. To know where your heart is, look at your checkbook register; the way we spend money will show where our hearts are.

She confesses that she looked at her checkbook and noticed that all her money went to things for herself and declared, “this needs to change because it displays selfishness. We need to be mindful of our desires.”

These two congregations represent a snapshot of the diversity of the African American religious landscape in rural and small town southern USA. There are considerable theological differences and various economic ethical frameworks that congregations operate within. There are divergent understandings of the relationship between theology, economics, and justice. Thus, there are differences and tensions over the nature and meaning of work and the meaning and role of wealth in the life of the believer. In one context, wealth is the divine right of the believer, in another, the emphasis is not on wealth but on being a good steward of one’s possessions, however meager or abundant. In Macon County, Alabama, home to just over 140 churches and a population just under 22,000, I was introduced to the Black Church in a sociohistorical context where race, religion, and economics uniquely intermingle, making it a meaningful context in which to examine the economic ethic of the Black churches. The economic ethic of the Black churches begs our attention and critical examination in the face of increasing economic inequality and trenchant principles and practices that uphold a market economy that traps individuals in cycles of deprivation. Amid these harsh realities of our political economy, religious institutions are believed to supply hope that individuals can transcend and transform their situation—the hope that they do not have to be poor.

Indeed, one of the members of Faith Power Ministries explained to me after Sunday worship service that people don’t have to be poor: “According to the Word of God, He [God] wishes that we all prosper and be in good health, so we don’t have to be poor; but it’s just got to be taught that we don’t have to be poor.” For this middle-aged, working-class woman who resides in persistently poor Macon County, it is empowering for her to hear the message reiterated every Sunday that one doesn’t have to be poor, especially, since economic status marks individuals according to value or worth in the eyes of others. This imposed value is used to establish cultural narratives that reinforce socially constructed

distinctions, which can calcify into problematic ideological sentiments. Ideologies, in turn, legitimate unjust distributions of resources and power. Since economic status is a measure of a person's worth in American society, possessions and wealth become the yardstick of (personal) importance. Even our religious institutions are hard pressed to escape this reality; thus, theologies of success and wealth fuel the fervent faith and the hope of many in the possibility of great wealth—wealth being one of the “virtues” extolled by a global market economy. However, the economy is steeped in inequality, and those marginalized within the global economy do need to hear that they do not have to be poor. As encouraging as this good news is, instead it is the news that Nobel laureate, Muhammad Yunus brings regarding poverty that can actually set our feet aright on the path to economic justice. He argues that poor people do not create poverty. Rather, “it is created by the system we have built, the institutions we have designed, and the concepts we have formulated.”¹ This realization must be the basis of economic justice.

Amid the cries in the USA of political leaders from the federal level to local Alabama statesmen, all the way to global laments by global figures, such as the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis (*Evangelii Gaudium*), economic injustice remains the nightmare that haunts our best efforts at providing for the welfare of humanity. Of the institutions laden with the responsibility of human welfare, religious institutions, particularly, within African American communities, are historically looked to for fulfilling the duty of attending to the spiritual, political, social, and economic welfare of individuals.

Indeed, religion has the force to aid individuals in shaping and re-engineering social identity, helping to maintain social stratification, and reinforcing social behavior. For instance, the connection between Christianity, racism, and social control has been arguably more intimate in the Bible Belt² than elsewhere in the USA.³ This historical connection between Christianity, identity, racism, and social control has enormous implications for the economic life of African Americans. The collective identities that Black churches provide help shape the moral conscience of African Americans and can either spur action toward the transformation of an economic reality of deprivation or uphold the status quo and legitimate unjust power and economic relations.

Historically, Black faith communities have been a central place—and sometimes the only place—where African Americans have been helped to negotiate the cognitive dissonance between their economic reality of

deprivation and the promise of a prosperous American society.⁴ Many of these faith communities understand part of their mission to be contributing to the improvement of individual and community well-being. For example, the pastor of Redeemer's Christian Church in Macon County argues that the church is ideally a refuge,

A place where we are prepared to take care of our own, to provide for our own and not just depend upon an [economic] system that really wasn't designed for us [African Americans] in the beginning. And [the church] should also make a way so that when the system fails,'cause [sic] we know that the economy is not as stable as it was, so in the event that the system fails, we'll be in a place where we can continue to grow and thrive; where our communities will continue to grow and thrive...

She is referring to the notion of the Church as a refuge for African Americans not only from social but economic distress. Sometimes, the church assists individuals with recreating a new identity that allows them to not just cope but "hope" themselves through the cognitive dissonance. For example, with the new identity that prosperity gospel allows, members actually believe that they are no longer poor, despite their circumstances. This book expands the ancient conversation of economics, ethics, and religion by examining the coalescence of poverty, theology, and justice within a rural southern community in the USA. Because Macon County is rural, poor, predominantly African American and Christian, it adds the specific dimension of race to the conversation. This conversation on race, religion, and economics has at its center the relationship between Christian identity and economic justice. This relationship between identity and justice is at the heart of religious economic ethics.

Because of the historical experience of racial discrimination, the Black Christian identity of many individuals within Macon County has been strongly correlated with strivings for social justice. However, in spite of civil rights gains, in the twenty-first century, particularly in rural communities within the Alabama Black Belt, a disproportionate number of African Americans remain trapped in persistent poverty. They reel from the effects of sedimented inequalities and struggle with entrenched economic injustice. Unfortunately, because of their current economic ethic, most Black churches are ill-equipped to address persistent poverty or to help enact real structural change in society. This book illumines what is at stake if the Church continues on its current economic ethical course.

BLACK CHRISTIAN ECONOMIC ETHICS: ACCOMMODATION AND LIBERATION

The economic ethic of Black churches can fall on a continuum between accommodationism at one end and liberation at the opposite end. Actions that correspond to the extremes of this continuum are charity, corresponding with accommodationism, and justice, corresponding with liberation. The reason the current economic ethic of the Black Church is morally inadequate to address structural inequalities that face the African American community is because it is accommodationist. In their examination of the various forms of African American religious response to hegemony, anthropologists Hans A. Baer and Merrill Singer define an accommodationist response as “attempting to create an acquiescent space for Blacks in a racist society.”⁵ This book appropriates Baer and Singer’s concept of accommodation for Black Christian economic ethics. Thus, accommodation relates to the acceptance of economic norms and principles that legitimate a system of inequality, where charity is set over and above justice seeking; where well-being is understood outside of gender, class, racial, economic, political, and cultural considerations, where the status quo is not challenged, and extant social hierarchies are unconsciously as well as consciously legitimated by persons in power and individuals benefitting from inequitable power relationships and economic structures. An accommodationist economic ethic, at best, embraces reformist measures to combat inequality and poverty, such as embracing “Black capitalism.” Often associated with Booker T. Washington’s self-help philosophy of pulling one’s self up by the bootstraps, Black capitalism was a movement to build wealth through ownership and development of businesses—in short, to build economic power through the principles and practices of capitalism.

The accommodationism that marks Black Church economic ethics today characterizes the Church from the nineteenth well into the twenty-first century. A significant proportion of leaders within the Church believe that social uplift and economic progress result from a reformist agenda that works from within electoral politics and the capitalist economy.⁶ By contrast, expressions of Black religious experience that are revolutionary and whose economic ethic can be considered liberationist come from either marginal sects or were the efforts of leaders, typically Black activist clergy, who many times did not have the backing of their congregation or denomination. Even Martin Luther King lost a great

deal of support when his political activism became “radical,” when “[t]he middle class reformer became a militant proponent of peace, economic democracy, and Black working class interests.”⁷

Historically, various marginal Black religious sects have offered a sustained critique of the form of global capitalism in America that is intricately tied to racism. Such Black faith communities reconfigure black identity beyond a humanizing reconstruction and take on a reengineered identity that breaks with European American social and economic identity. In such faith communities, such as the Black Hebrews, the Garveyites, the Shrine of the Black Madonna, and other Black nationalist religious communities, there is an effort to reject or break with the hegemonic forces of global capitalism that rely on a low-skilled, uneducated work force, comprised of racial and ethnic minorities, firmly on the bottom rungs of society. This type of rejection of global capitalism is characteristic of a liberationist economic ethic. One is hard pressed to find a liberationist economic ethic in many contemporary mainline Black congregations today, whose ranks are filled with middle class or aspiring middle-class adherents. Most of the local mainline denominational congregations have had and continue to have accommodationist economic ethics; that is, they have accepted the American economic order as is. Even while fighting systemic structures that perpetuate inequality, most black congregations continue to move toward being fully integrated *into* the economic system, while trying not to be *of* it; mimicking the religious pietism of being *in* the “world,” but not *of* it.

Instead of Black Church leadership and congregations becoming as King became in his later years, adopting a stance that the global capitalistic economic structure needed to be transformed and not just reformed, most African American congregations in this context adopted a form of Black capitalism as the path to black economic progress, as did the Nation of Islam. Thus, the pressing questions now are: What are the implications of remaining on an accommodationist path? What is at stake when individuals are receiving their moral formation in faith communities steeped in accommodationist rather than liberationist economic ethics? Most importantly, how does a liberationist economic ethic help in examining the implications of an accommodationist trajectory of Black churches’ economic ethics?

In its exploration of the interconnection between race, religion, and economics among African Americans, this book critiques the accommodationist nature of the economic ethic of Black churches within Macon

County and discusses the implications of this ethic for marginalized communities broadly. It argues that the current accommodationist economic ethic places these churches in danger of becoming inconsequential to communities which experience persistent poverty. The book also argues for the utility of a more morally adequate empowering economic ethic—one that is more humane, liberationist, and challenges the status quo and promotes striving for true justice rather than charity. Such an ethic will offer a critical framework for analyzing economic systems, theologies, and theoretical constructs, and most importantly, privileges the voices of those suffering from multiple oppressions. It emphasizes wholeness, relationship, communion, community, interdependence, commitment to addressing oppression in all its forms, and attention to the historical material reality of deprivation, exploitation, and sedimented inequalities—all of which are central to an inclusive economic ethic accounting for the lived experience of marginalized communities within the American hinterlands. This book's analysis focuses on the rural south, particularly the women, men, and children who reside in the impoverished rural Alabama Black Belt. Within Macon County, which sits in the heart of the Alabama Black Belt, we will witness the coalescence of race, region, and rurality in a way that makes it an appropriate case study.

RACE, REGION, AND RURALITY: MACON COUNTY, ALABAMA

Rev. Elliot, a serious and gentle elderly pastor of an American Baptist congregation who has spent more than thirty years of his life in service to his church and community in Macon County, laments its economic situation:

It's a depressed situation here...people are leaving...it's a place where you have to live by faith...and pray that God will somehow come through and break through some of this stuff...it's not the best picture but that's how it is....

Macon County has characteristics of rural areas throughout the USA: declining economies, climbing unemployment rates, and resource-poor local governments. The majority of the small rural towns within the county have poverty rates that are triple that of the USA in general; for women, they are quadruple the national rates and the poverty rates for children are even higher. This county sits between one of Alabama's

fastest growing counties and the state capitol, yet the economic progress of its neighboring counties seems to have skipped right over it. Like most rural areas, there are a few major employers in Macon County: Tuskegee University, the Veterans Administration Hospital, and the Dog Track (though only part of the Dog Track has been in operation, so it no longer employs as many residents as it once did).

Macon County is representative of many Black Belt counties throughout the South in that it contains a disproportionate number of our nation's poor. Most of the poverty in the southern region of the USA is within the Black Belt.⁸ In fact, three major factors in southern poverty are race, region, and rurality. Not only is poverty concentrated, but other poor quality of life indicators are concentrated in the South, especially in the Black Belt. There is a high incidence of preventable diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, and certain cancers. Additionally, rural communities within the Black Belt region, particularly, suffer from food insecurity, which is the lack of access to affordable, healthy food.⁹ Historically, the social mores and institutions within this region perpetuated a system of de facto economic apartheid that has through the years evolved into entrenched social and economic inequalities between Blacks and Whites. In fact, due to racial discrimination and Black disenfranchisement, in the mid-twentieth century, African American protests against segregation and discrimination were a push factor for the out-migration of many white residents and business owners, leaving a predominantly African American population in the county seat, Tuskegee, which persists today. Population migration is a constant source of economic pain for rural areas.¹⁰

Rural places within the USA have steadily lost population especially due to the movement of manufacturing overseas in search of lower labor costs and during times such as the farm crisis of the 1980s. However, with the rise of the New South, the economic growth that was experienced in the region during the late nineteenth and into the twentieth century, there was economic and population growth in both rural and urban areas. In fact, the region continues to benefit from this growth, for example, from 2000 to 2005, there was an overall 2.2% increase in the population. Although one can attribute a majority, three-fifths, of the population increase in rural regions, particularly in the South, to international migration, a good deal of it is from domestic migration, mainly from urban to rural areas. Urban to rural migration in the South accounts for 40% of net migration.¹¹ However, rural areas still have smaller populations than urban. The largest age group moving to

rural America is 40–59, regardless of ethnicity.¹² However, this trend in nonmetropolitan population growth has slowed a great deal. Since the beginning of the recession in 2007, the population growth rate in nonmetropolitan America has slowed. For example, in 2011, there was only a 0.11% increase in nonmetropolitan population compared to a 0.86% increase in metropolitan areas.¹³

The most conspicuous population change in the South, particularly the rural South, is the “reverse migration” of African Americans, caused by the pull of factors such as “persons seeking a new ‘land of promise’ and/or heeding a ‘call to home.’”¹⁴ Not only is there a noticeable influx of African Americans back into the rural South, the ethnic diversity of rural America is steadily increasing. However, this migration, like so much of what happens in rural areas in the USA, remains invisible. Likewise, the poverty, poor health, and food insecurity of these vulnerable populations continue to be invisible.

The invisibility of pockets of chronically impoverished communities that characterize rural areas nationwide presents a challenge to researchers and policy makers. The southern rural Black Belt with its predominantly black and Christian population has persistently been plagued with severe economic decline. Some congregations have responded energetically, while others simply try to survive the weight of generations of poverty. While many African Americans are heeding a call to home, many black congregations find themselves trying to heed ongoing cries of poor citizens for justice and equality—for visibility. This book tells the story of churches within this social context who are struggling with an identity that is marked by ambiguity with respect to economic justice. It tells of the difficulty of reconciling their theology with their socioeconomic realities. It tells of the experiences of such persons, churches, and communities situated within a broader world of global capitalism over which they have no control. This assessment is relevant for congregations throughout the nation who need to heed the call to do justice on behalf of and in partnership with economically vulnerable populations. This book provides a liberationist framework to such congregations for actual praxis.

LIBERATIONIST ECONOMIC ETHICAL FRAMEWORK

The implications of an accommodationist economic ethic become clearer when considered in light of a liberationist economic ethical framework which challenges us to re-envision, redesign, and rebuild, not just on a

physical but on a conceptual level.¹⁵ The implications of the current accommodationist economic ethic of the Black Church include: uncritical acceptance of economic capitalist rationality; indifference with respect to *seeing* the poor; perpetuation of the stigmatization of the poor; paternalism; and an emphasis on charity over and above justice. The current economic ethic has allowed the Black Church to grow accustomed to the decades-old economic crises that have plagued communities in the geographic and social hinterlands of the nation. This manifests, in some congregations, in a seeming indifference toward poor and their stigmatization.

What does this tell us about what we value and the extent to which we value the dignity of *all* American citizens? A liberationist economic ethic helps communities realize the artificial, external imposition that poverty is on persons. It advocates expending intellectual and physical energies in community empowerment, knowing that because poverty is external (as opposed to an internal character or cultural flaw), it can be removed.¹⁶

African Americans in the rural South such as the members of faith communities in Macon County, Alabama, which I describe here, are an important epistemological source for constructing and revisioning ethical ideals about Christian behavior in the marketplace. They help us broaden our understanding of the possibilities for constructing public ethics. As we listen to the voices from the pulpit and pews, we hear silence where there should be a dialogue about justice for those who suffer as a result of the neglect of individuals with power and privilege who have turned a deaf ear to the calls for justice. Fortunately, we also hear the voices of those uncomfortable with the way things are. A liberationist economic ethic challenges and informs the ethic that currently guides the praxis of the congregations in Macon County which is mainly accommodationist.

But let us begin at the beginning, with the most basic assumption in this book—that there is still a Black Church.

THERE IS *STILL* A BLACK CHURCH

Some scholars argue against talking about the Black Church as a single entity. Others go so far as to say that the Black Church no longer exists. However, in rural areas such as the Black Belt, there remains a “Black Church” particularly as a site of moral formation and as a catalyst for action, or alternatively for sanctioning indifference to economic realities and the prevailing economic order. There is a Black Church mainly because the social, economic, and cultural dynamics lend themselves to

the continuation of such a concept. Many of these faith communities in the Black Belt have long responded to the combined forces of hegemony and economic exploitation that have affected the lives of their constituents. However, the role of the Black Church is changing, and members are left wrestling with how changes in their communities and beyond alter how they understand the identity of their religious institution. An elderly working-class member of St. Paul AMEZ Church explained to me how the church “back in his day” was not just a religious but a social institution: “back then, the church was the only place people really could get together and socialize, but that’s no longer the case. There’s a lot of competition out there for entertainment options.” The role of the Black Church has changed and continues to evolve.

Members of these institutions find themselves re-evaluating what the church is and should be. “I know we used to call it the Black Church, but I look at the Church more universally, it just so happened that we all happen to be black that go here,” argues Miss Basden, an elderly retired school teacher in Macon County, who belongs to Greater Hope Missionary Baptist Church, one of the oldest black congregations in the county. Even though many members of the various study churches are all members of “traditional” mainline Black churches, there is a clear understanding that the Church universal is not bound by color. Some respondents even rejected altogether the descriptor “Black Church.” On the other hand, others hold firmly to the descriptor and even fear for the survival of the Black Church amid what they claim to be an “unchurched” generation of youth who seem to take no interest in the Church. Actually, most of the church members in Macon County are elderly, by virtue of their location in the rural Black Belt. The majority of young people leave the area in search of economic opportunity, but the few young adults and college-aged individuals that I interviewed were raised in the church, which is one of the reasons they give for continuing to attend church. In fact, Pew Research Center’s Religion and Public Life Project, Religious Landscape Survey, reports that 25% of young adult and college-aged individuals (age 18–29) are not currently affiliated with a particular religion.¹⁷

Even though this book argues that there is a Black Church, it supports the claim that the Black Church is theologically, doctrinally, politically, and ethically diverse—as it has always been throughout its history. This diversity accounts for the ambiguity that one finds with respect to the Church’s economic ethics.

Despite the strong connection between race, religion, and economics, details about the *rural* Black Church, and particularly the rural Black church in the *South*, are lacking in both religious and social scientific scholarship.¹⁸ A good deal of the literature on religion in this region deals with single denominations or single issues and usually has a historical focus, such as the antebellum period and slavery. Studies that directly address rural poverty and the church are usually denominationally focused, such as The United Methodist Church's "The Churches' Response to the Rural Crisis." The few studies done specifically on the Black Church in the rural southern context are notable for their contribution to the field of religious studies, for instance, W.E.B DuBois's, *The Negro Church*. Other scholarly studies evince the value and distinction of rural religious life; for example, empirical study of rural churches was part of C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya's larger classic study of the Black Church in the African American experience. Their experience in the research field proved that the distinctions of the rural South necessitated a separate questionnaire. The majority of Black churches in the South are historically rural institutions, from their origins in the middle of the eighteenth century and throughout most of their history.¹⁹ As Lincoln and Mamiya note, what distinguished them from other churches were their absentee pastors, small congregations, and the lower levels of educational attainment among their pastors.

Although this book is not an ethnographic study, it grows out of my doctoral studies, several years of working in the university in Macon County, Alabama, serving on the ministerial staff of a local church there, as well as my service to one of its local minister's councils. The primary data collected are used as part of my liberationist methodology and consciousness, where "poor Black folk are named as the locus its values," focusing on the lives of poor and working poor black women, men, and children and the social and institutional structures that impede their quality of life, while remaining accountable to and challenging the Black Church, employing not only its liturgical resources, but its people as sources for theological and ethical reflection.²⁰

My field research took place over a period of two years, 2006 into 2008. During this time, I attended weekly Sunday morning worship services, Bible studies, and some special programs such as Church Anniversary celebrations, Christmas plays, and Black history programs at four churches that are featured in this book. I also conducted focus groups with eighteen laity and personal interviews with the leadership

in these four case study churches in order to gain insight into lay perspectives regarding: the church's responsibility to the poor; what their church teaches about the poor, Christian responsibility regarding wealth; what their church does for the poor; and how faith impacts economic behavior. Additionally, I conducted personal interviews with twelve clergy across Macon County, from various denominations, in order to get a sense of the diversity of theological and doctrinal foundations of economic ethics. My research is also informed by my work at Tuskegee University's Nation Center for Bioethics in Research and Health Care where I have consistently worked with congregations in their faith and health Initiative from 2011 until 2017. Because of that work, I was able to gain insight into even more churches within Macon County. I attended worship services, Bible studies, and special programs of churches other than those in my field research. This allowed me to obtain even greater breadth of perceptions regarding the connection between race, religion, and economics. The reason for choosing the four case study churches that are featured in this book is not just because they represent the diversity found in the Black religious landscape of the rural South specifically, but because they represent the diversity of rural and urban America more broadly. They represent denominational diversity, gender diversity in leadership, diversity in the role of the church in the community, and diversity in worship. In short, they point to where the Black Church has been and where it is going.

NOTES

1. Muhammad Yunus, *Building Social Business: A New Kind of Capitalism that Serves Humanity's Most Pressing Needs* (New York City, New York: PublicAffairs, 2010).
2. Bible Belt is a term that refers to the southern region of the USA that has a large proportion of conservative evangelical protestant inhabitants who are believed to be characterized by religious fundamentalism. See also *American Religious Identification Surveys*. <http://commons.trincoll.edu/aris>.
3. Bruce B. Williams and Bonnie Thornton Dill, "African Americans in the Rural South: The Persistence of Racism and Poverty," in *The Changing American Countryside: Rural People and Places*, Clifton R. Wharton, Jr., ed. (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1995).
4. Stephanie Mitchem, *Name It and Claim It? Prosperity Preaching in the Black Church* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2007).

5. Hans A. Baer and Merrill Singer, *African-American Religion in the Twentieth Century: Varieties of Protest and Accommodation* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee, 1992).
6. *Ibid.*, 99.
7. Manning Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped America: Problems in Race, Political Economy and Society* (Boston, Massachusetts: South End Press, 1983), 209–210.
8. Wimberly, Ronald C. and Libby V. Morris. *The Southern Black Belt: A National Perspective*. Kentucky: Tennessee Valley Authority Rural Studies, 1997. See also University of Georgia Carl Vinson Institute of Government, *Dismantling Persistent Poverty in the Southeastern United States*, (Athens, Georgia, 2003); MCD, Inc., *State of the South 2002: Shadows in the Sunbelt Revisited*, (Chapel Hill, NC, 2002).
9. Wylin Wilson and Norbert Wilson, “African American Health Activism in the Twenty-first Century: Black Women and the Farm Bill,” *Race, Gender and Class*, 20, 1/2(2013): 232–243. See also Wylin Wilson, Rueben Warren, Stephen Sodeke and Norbert Wilson, “The Fate of Local Food Systems in the Global Industrialization Market: Food and Social Justice in the Rural South,” *Professional Agriculture Workers Journal*, 1:1 (2013), <http://tuspubs.tuskegee.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1003&context=pawj>.
10. See Patrick J. Carr and Maria J. Kefalas, *Hollowing Out the Middle: The Rural Brain Drain and What it Means for America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009).
11. See Jolliffe, *Rural America at a Glance*, Economic Information Bulletin Number 18 (August 2006).
12. *Ibid.*
13. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, *Rural America at a Glance*, Economic Information Bulletin Number 21 (August 2012).
14. William Falk, Larry Hunt, et al. “Return Migrations of African Americans to the South: Reclaiming a Land of Promise, Going Home or Both?” In *Rural Sociology* 69, no. 4 (2004): 490–509. See also Carol Stack, *A Call to Home: African Americans Reclaim the Rural South* (New York: Basic Books, 1996).
15. Muhammad Yunus, *Building Social Business*.
16. *Ibid.*
17. <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports>, retrieved Dec. 31, 2013.
18. See Stephanie Mitchem, *Name It, Claim It: Prosperity Preaching in the Black Church*; Keri Day, *Unfinished Business: Black Women, the Black Church and the Struggle to Thrive in America* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2012); Omar M. McRoberts, *Streets of Glory: Church and*

- Community in a Black Urban Neighborhood* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Marvin McMickle, *Preaching to the Black Middle Class: Words of Challenge, Words of Hope* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 2000); Dale P. Andrews, *Practical Theology for Black Churches: Bridging Black Theology and African American Folk Religion* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2002); Marcellus Andrews, *The Political Economy of Hope and Fear*; Andrew Billingsley, *Mighty Like a River: The Black Church and Social Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Fredrick C. Harris, *Something Within: Religion in African-American Political Activism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
19. Lincoln and Mamiya, "In the Receding Shadow of the Plantation: a Profile of Rural Clergy and Churches in the Black Belt, *Review of Religious Research* 29, no. 4 (June 1988), 352.
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Wilson, W.D.

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